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Striving to Increase BIPOC Family Participation in Early Childhood Family Education

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Striving to Increase BIPOC Family Participation in Early Childhood Family Education

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate in Education.

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To my family, George, Seiji, and Kai: Thank you for believing in me and your support in making this happen. I love you so much. This celebration is for all of us. Seiji and Kai, you can do anything you put your mind to it with dedication and perseverance. We are here to support you just like you did for me - dream big.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Dr. Ruth E. Randall, the Minnesota Department of Education commissioner, stated in 1989, "Early Childhood Family Education is considered one of the major innovations in public education in this country" (as cited in Kristensen et al., 1989, Preface). Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a public education program designed and available for all parents and families in Minnesota. The mission of ECFE is "to strengthen the families through education and support of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth of their children" (MNAFEE, n.d., p. 2). The definition of "parent/s" will follow ECFE's definition, which "includes all individuals who function in a primary parenting role" (MNAFEE, 2011, p. 1). The support for parents can be seen in many different ways, such as through home visits, traditional group classes, phone calls, and gatherings at apartment complex visits. Although there is no emphasis on building community and relationships in the ECFE's mission statement, creating a gathering space where families assemble naturally becomes a space where families build relationships to learn about and from each other.

Parents living and attending ECFE in various districts emphasized that ECFE helped them feel more connected to the community and develop friendships from the group and their neighborhood (Brown, 1995; Walker et al., 2019). The connection was also experienced in an online setting where resources, sharing, and parent and teacher collaborative gatherings took place with some communities (Walker, 2018; Walker et al., 2019). The importance of community continues to be highlighted in places of gathering. This form of education, or schooling, has been available in different formats, public and

private, for quite some time. Spring (2020) discussed the history of schooling and its contribution to social goals and wondered about the roles of schools and how best to support social issues and concerns (pp. 31-55). In thinking about social goals and building community, John Dewey (1902) stated that schools "must provide means for bringing people and their ideas and beliefs together, in ways that will lessen friction and instability, and introduce deeper sympathy and wider understanding" (p. 83). Furthermore, when addressing the importance of schools and teachers, Comer and Poussaint (2000) were hopeful that "social problems could be prevented or ameliorated" when all families, teachers, and parents worked to have "patience, understanding, and humanity" (p. xi). A shared space and educational environment can create that magic.

As Dr. Randall affirmed ECFE as "a major innovation" in education (Kristensen et al., 1989), I wondered how ECFE reached all communities. Cooke et al. (2001) stated that ECFE attending and participating in ECFE is voluntary, which then obliges ECFE programs to reach "a demographic cross-section of the families living within their school district boundaries" (Chapter 8, p. 1). This creates a great responsibility for those who supervise community outreach. As a transplant from New York and through personal experience as a parent and a licensed parent educator, I only learned about ECFE through colleagues of early childhood educators in Minnesota. Unfortunately, however, not everyone has the experience and opportunity to learn about the existence of ECFE. When I interact with adults without children or whose profession is not related to education, especially People of Color, I find that they do not know about ECFE at all. For this reason, there was an incentive to research ECFE's outreach methods and whether or not it varies in every district. In understanding that attendance is voluntary, it is necessary to

note and discover how other known barriers also exist, such as the available languages, cultural differences, and the availability of class times.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand the current methodologies of parent education outreach and collaboration with other programs, in particular, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, and explore and process what efforts have been made to increase BIPOC participation in traditional ECFE parent education group classes in Minnesota. The research will also examine BIPOC participation in traditional ECFE classes, explore and discover the types of support ECFE educators and coordinators need to reach the BIPOC communities, and in turn, generate or expand on their ideas by reflecting on their current practices.

Proposed Dissertation Research

My supposition is that ECFE programs and educators, depending on the districts, have different and varied outreach methods to recruit hard-to-reach families and People of Color to the traditional group ECFE classes and rely much on word of mouth, open houses, pamphlets, or letters, which may not generate long term participation. MDE (2011a) defined "outreach" as "proactive, purposeful contact with others outside of your organization or program" (p. 1). Most ECFE websites cite that they serve their community by collaborating with other programs; however, they provide few details about how they implement and how often they continue the collaboration.

The research question is: *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?*

Secondary questions are:

- *What are the current outreach methodologies that ECFE staff in Minnesota utilize to engage with families in their own communities?*

- *What is their collaborative process with other community partnerships?*

This research aims to learn and understand ECFE's current methods of parent education outreach and collaboration process with other programs, particularly BIPOC communities. By using the qualitative research methodology of surveys and interviews, the aim is to find common outreach methodologies that invite BIPOC families to traditional group classes, learn common themes that may drive or challenge educators and administrators, and learn new possible methods of outreach to increase and retain BIPOC families in the future.

During my experience as an ECFE participant from 2011 to 2013 and student teaching at two different ECFE sites in 2017, I found that most parent attendees were heteronormative and White, with the occasional BIPOC families included in the population. Being a parent of color myself and an English language learner, I would have appreciated knowing peers with similar experiences and struggles and an educator who may have understood one attribute of my experience. However, being placed in an affinity group where most participants look like me would also not have fulfilled my need to learn and be supported by a racially diverse community.

Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota (2017) released an evaluation report for early childhood program access and reported that in 2015, participants who attended ECFE before Kindergarten were 79% White. The evaluation report also documented that ECFE had the least amount of BIPOC participants out of all the early childhood programs that were offered in Minnesota (pp. 7-8). By living through and observing the lack of

BIPOC participation in first-tier suburbs of two major cities, I created a bias assuming that little effort is made to increase BIPOC participation in ECFE programs. My assumptions grew that mostly White people attend these group classes. Unfortunately, research from Jordan et al. (2018) also confirmed that ECFE served wealthier White children at a higher rate than all other racial/ethnic groups (p. 4).

ECFE program coordinators and leaders have conducted a few studies throughout the span of 30 years. A couple of research studies, particularly, investigated the effectiveness and the success of their programming involving low-income families and hard-to-reach families in the 90s (Mueller, 1996, 1998). They made efforts with outreach and provided information on the effects and success of non-white and low-income participation in ECFE. A few years later, another study was conducted to understand and create an evaluation process for the program quality of ECFE (Keller, 2001). While Keller (2001) researched a few programs in ECFE to enhance quality in ECFE evaluation for organizational learning and change, she found that the collaboration and outreach process was being reported as something that needed improvement and continued consistently (Keller, 2001, p. 103). Unfortunately, Keller (2001) found that tight budgets, lack of time, and the roles and hats the program coordinators and educators wear were key issues that created barriers for ECFE programs to retain or involve BIPOC and low-income families.

Because Minnesota is primarily a White state, about 78% according to the Minnesota 2020 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), all education, including ECFE, is focused on White people, and the practice is not culturally relevant to BIPOC families (Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota, 2017, p. 2). Love (2020) also stated that 88% of all

teachers are White in the nation (p. 131). The Whiteness of teachers reported by Love (2020) is also an issue for ECFE as the majority of ECFE educators and program coordinators are White; it is crucial to learn how the programs or educators help alleviate this issue.

As part of the ECFE outreach methodology listed in the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) (2011a), collaboration is listed as one of the methods to find and recruit participants. ECFE programs must report the data on their outreach and collaborative efforts. Wikidot for Early Childhood Program Administration website (2015), a site that is dedicated to ECFE administrators and coordinators, defined collaboration as "In collaboration . . . staff of separate programs actually work together to create a new or enhanced resource for families" (Collaboration). For example, when providing a grant-funded, one-year ECFE expansion project with the K-3 grades, ECFE teachers found that collaborating with other elementary teachers to reach out, assess, and provide information helped them form a better plan for the classes and the program (Harding et al., 1991). ECFE recognizes collaboration as a powerful source of growth and development for programs. Perhaps this can be one of the common and continuous methods to make traditional group parent education classes inclusive and be offered offsite.

ECFE and parent education pursue connections, which leads to more empathy, love, and learning about each other. Thus, while continuing my career as an early childhood specialist, I pursued parent education licensure and participated in a parent education student teaching experience. This was the beginning of my journey and interest

in parent education and the effects parent education has on families and the group's well-being.

Personal Connection to ECFE

Currently, I am an early childhood and parent educator for the Child Development Laboratory School at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. I have always advocated for and am passionate about early childhood education, but I was unaware of parent or family education until I moved to Minnesota in August 2007. Even then, it was apparent that only a select group around me knew the meaning of family and parent education. I gained a deeper understanding of parent education when I became pregnant and started a "Mommy and Me" class at the hospital pre- and post-pregnancy. This program is similar to an ECFE class, where one of the beneficial services is a group class where parents are encouraged to share parenting journeys, experiences, and struggles while learning about child development and various parenting skills. Parents can learn about each other's differences while also finding similarities in the joys and struggles of parenthood. Through this program, I found a group of parents who became my supportive unit during the early stages of motherhood. We became friends and, through one of the friend's recommendations, who was also a teacher, continued our education through ECFE public parent education program in the following years.

As an early childhood educator who taught children and worked with families who attended our preschool for the first time, I found myself constantly discussing information about child development with the families and learning about their family values, structure, and culture. I tried to provide relevant information but occasionally found myself in conflicts of values or cultural experiences during discussions about child

development with families who were different than me. Upon reflection, it felt necessary to learn more about adult support and family learning and understand how I can facilitate and provide information in a neutral but informative manner while respecting everyone's differences and personal experiences.

Unlike many of my parent education license cohort members at the University of Minnesota, when I received my license as a parent educator, I continued to work in my current position rather than moving to ECFE programs. During my studies, I learned a lot about adult learning and cognition while empathizing with the humbling and exhausting experience involved with parenting. Parent education is a learning experience, and when participating in a traditional group environment, it is a space where caregivers and parents often feel camaraderie and social-emotional connection with peers when they share similar struggles and questions about parenting. Heath and Heath (2017) echoed this concept by stating, "Groups bond when they struggle together" (p. 247).

Ultimately, to truly understand each other's culture and values and respect each other's similarities and differences, I believe a program and a classroom should represent everyone in the community or their district. This particular research agenda can be a catalyst for growth in ECFE and parent education programs to support the next group of families and children in having empathy, understanding, support, and love for one another.

Positionality Statement

As an Asian American educator who moved to Minnesota from New York as an adult, the information about ECFE programs, such as the traditional group and parent education classes, was not immediately accessible or marketed to me. To this day, when

speaking to peers without children or other adults outside the education field, including
BIPOC communities, a lack of information regarding ECFE is still not uncommon.

As an ECFE parent participant from 2011 to 2013, attending the group classes,
learning about basic parenting needs, and answering questions about sleep, feeding, and
development were helpful. However, the classes lacked information on the influences and
differences of racial and cultural values and how the suggested or given guidance was
one aspect of supportive parenting, which would have benefited a bicultural and bilingual
parent like me. Nevertheless, the experience promoted camaraderie in knowing others
shared the same basic parenting struggles.

Lastly, as a licensed early childhood and parent educator, it is important to
acknowledge the struggles and barriers that ECFE administrators and educators face,
such as budgeting and lack of staffing, which may affect reaching BIPOC communities
with specific barriers.

Possible Biases Impacting Data

As I learn more about ECFE's collaborative and outreach efforts with different
communities within the Twin Cities and suburbs of Minnesota, I believe a program and a
classroom should represent everyone in the community or their district; my goal is to be
neutral throughout the process. I am cognizant that I may interpret their collaborative
records and methodology in favor of my research assumptions. Using the working
definition of collaboration, the goal is to refer to this definition while interpreting the
data. Since I am not a regular ECFE educator or part of a school district ECFE program,
my perspective as an outsider could bring fresh eyes to this research. However, it may

cloud my understanding of how the organizational system of ECFE works and the

barriers that prevent them from making changes.

Summary

Senge et al. (2012) noted that "In our increasingly interdependent world, no one

can truly create a 'school that learns' without engaging and changing the community that

surrounds it. And whenever that engagement is incomplete, school reform efforts fail" (p.

21). Parent education, particularly traditional group classes, benefits families and helps

create empathy and possibly friendships. Even if parents do not believe they need it, it is

a therapeutic way to gather with people with shared experiences (Kristensen & Billman,

1987; Kristensen et al., 1989). Efforts need to be made to include more people to create a

wider understanding of other families and cultures, especially when racism, classism, and

all other isms are still apparent in our world. A public program, such as ECFE, can have a

big potential and impact to make the change. My hope is that group classes in ECFE can

successfully reach all communities and truly be a catalyst for love, care, and community

building for one another and not be beneficial for just one group of people.

Block (2018) emphasized the importance of creating an honest community

structure from the ground up and creating a space where everyone is involved and

discussed ways change occurs: "Transformation occurs when we focus on the structure of

how we gather and the context in which the gatherings take place" (p. 77). This research

can reignite the mission and create a true potential for future community-building

processes and collaborative teamwork at the instructor's level and the participant's level.

Thus, by investigating the research question, *How do ECFE programs and educators*

currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation

amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes? And secondary questions: *What are the current outreach methodologies that ECFE staff in Minnesota utilize to engage with families in their own communities? What is their collaborative process with other community partnerships?* focusing on understanding the outreach and collaborative methodologies will help us better understand the next steps. By prioritizing the process of racially diversifying the student and parent population of the publicly funded ECFE programs in the group ECFE classes, parents and children can learn about the differences and similarities of one another and develop empathy for parenting, life circumstances, children that are not their own, and the community they live in. ECFE can contribute to a model of community understanding and growth and reduce the opportunity gaps in Minnesota.

Summary of Upcoming Chapters

In the upcoming chapters of this research, chapter two is the literature review with an overview of the history of parent education, the significance of parent involvement and education, and the history of ECFE. Information on ECFE outreach methodologies, other programs' methods for parent education, and the roles of the parent educator in ECFE programs are also included. Additionally, Chapter Two addresses the known and possible barriers to BIPOC families attending ECFE group classes and some of the known reports and data of ECFE's current collaborative efforts with other programs. Chapter Three focuses on the methodology of this qualitative study, such as the interview and survey process and the framework to be used. Chapter Four provides the data that is collected from the study. Chapter Five reviews the results of the data and my analysis of the study. I will also review the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program is a publicly funded parent and family education program available to all families in Minnesota. The mission of ECFE is "to strengthen the families through education and support of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth of their children" (MNAFEE, n.d., p. 2). There are many different formats and supports in ECFE, including home visits, traditional group classes, phone calls, and community gatherings. Cooke (1992) and Mueller (1996) researched the benefits of parent involvement and education provided by ECFE. Although ECFE is a program that is accessible to all, Jordan et al. (2018) found that the program "served wealthier White children at a higher rate than all other racial/ethnic groups" (p. 4). It is necessary to understand the history and purpose of parent education and the development of ECFE to uncover the importance of this support. Additionally, it is important to address the different barriers that may prevent Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families from participating in available programs to support and serve their needs. According to MDE's raw data (2021) of the various district's outreach information, while ECFE staff works continuously to reach out to BIPOC communities through phone calls, home visits, and other targeted or individualized communications and connections, there is a general concern over lack of BIPOC families involved in ECFE.

Because the purpose of this research is to understand the current methodologies of parent education outreach and further examine the BIPOC participation in traditional

ECFE group classes, research questions will explore these aspects and also investigate the types of support ECFE educators and coordinators need to reach the BIPOC communities. The research question is: *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?* Secondary questions are*: What are the current outreach methodologies that ECFE staff in Minnesota utilize to engage with families in their own communities? What is their collaborative process with other community partnerships?* The literature review addresses the necessary themes in the study.

Themes to Unpack

Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective on human development, several factors impact the well-being of parents and children, such as relationships, culture, and environment. With this understanding, there is research about the positive effects education has on primary caregivers and their children when raising children. The history, development, and research of ECFE also depict how public parent education programming has supported families in different ways. This research aims to provide knowledge about the history of parent education and a general overview of the development and goals of ECFE. It also aims to inform how crucial it is for the programming to be accessible for everyone to create opportunities for the children and their future. Because parent education is becoming more recognized as positive support and a necessity for families, topics about the roles and qualifications of the parent educator, different types of parent education and outreach methods, and possibilities for further improvements will also be addressed. Themes will include the history of parent education, the significance of parent involvement and parent education classes, the

history of ECFE, ECFE's outreach methodologies, the role and process of being parent

educators, and barriers entangled in reaching all of its community members.

Parent Education

It is helpful to understand the complex role of parenting to learn the origins of

parent education. Parenting is humbling, and it affects one's well-being and mental

health. It presents a variety of feelings and emotions, such as excitement, sadness, worry,

anger, pride, and confusion. Whether the parents are prepared for this experience or not,

this role provides a lot of demands, expectations, and responsibilities (National

Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; Popkin, 2014). Specifically,

"Parenting often is defined as a primary mechanism of socialization, that is, a primary

means of training and preparing children to meet the demands of their environments and

take advantage of opportunities within those environments" (National Academies of

Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016, pp. 19-20). The experiences are also shaped

by the support they may have had from others, including governmental support and

programs (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016, p. 22).

Their parenting roles and practices are often informed by their experiences and ecological

circumstances that affect their knowledge of parenting.

Definition of Parent Education

Croake and Glover (1977) defined parent education as a "purposive learning

activity of parents who are attempting to change their method of interaction with their

children for the purpose of encouraging positive behavior in their children" (p. 151). The

definition has evolved, and in 2022, ECFE described parent education services as

"support of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth of

their children" (MNAFEE, n.d., p. 2). As parents work through their experiences and practices, their actions influence children and their development.

History of Parent Education

Croake and Glover (1977) described how parent education has existed since the late 1800s, although it was never formalized as an official group of existence. A group of mothers at that time created information and support groups called "maternal associations" that provided feelings of comradery (p. 151). Campbell and Palm (2004) also noted that writings, reflections, and support groups that share joys and concerns about parenting existed for at least 200 years.

Similarly, magazines such as *Mother's Magazine, Mother's Assistant*, and *Parent's Magazine* about parenting were available in the 1820s through 1840s (Sunley, 1955). In the 1800s, research about child development and psychology increased, and parents sought more information to better understand their children through conferences and group education, which were often led by child psychologists or other professionals in the related field (Campbell & Palm, 2004). With growing popularity and information, formal parent education groups and meetings started to take form by the early 1900s.

The popularity of parent education and the growing concept of progressive education, influenced by John Dewey and his work on experiential learning and constructivism (University of Vermont, John Dewey Project on Progressive Education, 2002), coincided in the 1920s. Therefore, more attention was paid to parental influence in the children's early childhood years, and parents increasingly sought out parent education groups (Cambell & Palm, 2004). Funding has also increased through charities, such as the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial and the Spellman Fund, between the 1920s

and 1940s, which broadened child study centers in universities and colleges in states across the country, including Minnesota (Cowan et al., 1998). Around the 1940s, a pediatrician named Dr. Benjamin Spock wrote a book about parenting, which became a resource for parents (as cited Carter & Kahn, 1996). This was a turning point for parent education as Dr. Spock's book and parenting resources became popular, and "the traditional informal supports [family, friends, community groups] and the sense of collective responsibility [to raise children] disappeared in the last 30 years" (p. 3). Around the 1950s, training programs in the parent education field were also offered for professionals, such as nurses, early childhood educators, and social workers, for those who wanted to further their expertise and education (Auerbach, 1968, pp. 218-222).

There are positive correlations associated with learning and understanding child development and having positive relationships and engagement between the child and the parents (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016, p. 3). By the 1960s and 70s, parent education programs provided various assistance, including home visiting as one of the main services to connect with families in the United States. Group parenting services continued, but new initiatives developed where services started to aim at specific groups of people (Campbell & Palm, 2004).

As an example, the Head Start program included parent education as part of its program to support families in poverty. Group parent education also started to aim at supporting children with special needs (Campbell & Palm, 2004). Programs, such as Minnesota Early Learning Design (MELD), started to train the parents who attended their program to create more support groups (Campbell & Palm, 2004). Despite these initiatives, however, Croake and Glover (1977) suggested that educational programming

was geared toward upper and middle-class parents, and the majority of the research up to the 1960s represented those populations (pp. 152-156). Based on their research, Croake and Glover (1977) predicted that parent education programs would continue to be focused primarily on group discussions with increased attention to education and mental health (p. 157). By the 1970s and into the 1990s, states such as Missouri and Minnesota took notice of the variety of parent education services offered in different settings and began to examine the possibilities of public services. As a result, more standardizations and frameworks were developed for the parent educator profession (Campbell & Palm, 2004).

The concept of parent education and the purpose of the services continue to change with time, the influences and needs of the community, and the variety of professionals who accept the role, such as social workers and early childhood educators (Campbell & Palm, 2004; Manalo & Meezan, 2000). Thus, the expectations of parent educators become more complex. Furthermore, there is an increase in research about children's brain development, providing a stable environment and foundation in the early years, and the roles of parental and primary caregivers increased (Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota, 2017, p. 1). For this reason, the goal would not only focus on teaching child development and different methods of childrearing but include learning how to facilitate discussions, share ideas, and support and understand various cultural backgrounds and values.

Parent education has been around for quite some time and has evolved over the years according to the participants' needs. The services, facilitators' roles, and expectations also changed. It will continue to evolve when the demographics widen,

involving more participants of different cultures and backgrounds. This information is necessary to understand the fluidity of parent education throughout history.

Significance of Parent Involvement and Education

When studying early childhood development and practices, research often points to the importance of the first five years of a child's life, which are critical and "most open to the influence of relationships and experiences" (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016, p. 1). Additionally, Keating et al. (2020) reported that the first three years are crucial in supporting and developing the healthy growth of children. If these supports are not available, there are consequences that are difficult to undo (p. 6). These examples show that children's mental and emotional connections through their interactions with materials and people are vital in the early stages of life.

Even though these years are essential, not all parents and caregivers are prepared mentally or physically to accommodate those needs. For example, according to Teti et al. (2017), there is a lack of public policy in the U.S. that supports "competent parenting practices," which affect the foundations of children's learning (pp. 2-6). In a parental blog post for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Kirkwood (2016) emphasized the importance and hardships of parental involvement. She stated that although most parents want to participate and be involved in their children's learning and education, many lack the knowledge of child development or may not know how to support their child in the home environment. Carter and Kahn (1996) also pointed out the myth of "parental instinct," which does not always come to first-time parents. As the family constructs changed, not everyone had the traditional informal support of

family, friends, and community groups, which called for new support and resources (pp. 1-3).

Teti et al. (2017) reiterated that whether or not the parents have a biological connection with their children, their role as parents is significant enough that if "competent parenting is at risk, the children are at risk as well" (p. 3). Given the risk to children, providing support to families through programs like ECFE will likely improve babies' and caregivers' lives (Teti et al., 2017; Gomby et al., 1995). Bierman et al. (2017) acknowledged that parents play a "critical role" in their children's lives as they support the children's learning at home before they reach school (p. 2). According to Keating et al. (2020), although it is acknowledged that parents play an important role in their children's lives in the early years, not enough information is provided to emphasize the importance of the parenting role, the children's development, and services offered "to ensure [the children's] foundational development is on track." For example, not enough parents are informed and realize that reading, singing, and talking are critical in the children's early years (p. 48).

Carter and Kahn (1996) also discussed the bias that was passed down "for generations" by society assuming that "raising a child was instinctive" for women and it was the "natural order of things," which these assumptions led to a lot of women to feel guilty if they did not have this instinct (p. 1). The feeling of guilt and the need for support created reasons for parent education services to be critical and necessary. Parent education programs that involve educating, informing, and communicating in a respectful, supportive manner also create precedence for future relationships between educators and caregivers. Some common parent education practices are educating about

child development and discussing and problem-solving common parental concerns, such as sleeping, eating, guidance and discipline, and behavior.

Teti et al. (2017) further explained that children's early surroundings and environments are critical and that providing "competent parenting" that involves thoughtful and developmentally appropriate practice is necessary (p. 6). The basic support and involvement of parents are crucial and should start as early as possible. Bierman et al. (2017) also stated, "When preschools engage parents effectively and coordinate the efforts of teachers and parents in partnership, it sets the stage for positive parent engagement in subsequent school years" (p. 4). With this information, organizations such as Northside Achievement Zone, St. Paul Promise Neighborhood, and Way to Grow offer nonprofit parent or family education classes, while others have public or community education classes.

According to French (2014), a journalist who researched ECFE, Minnesota has a strong record of having the top support and education for young children and families. Funding is bipartisan, and politicians find investing in early education beneficial. Thus, it is a public program that is mostly state-funded (p. 36). French (2014) argued his reasoning that "ECFE [Early Childhood Family Education] is designed for all families, not just those with a low income. Business, community, and political leaders see it as a service for everyone, not a handout to the poor" (p. 37). To further understand the effects and the value of the program, Cooke (1992) and Mueller (1996) both conducted research on the effectiveness of ECFE parent education classes on middle and low-income families in Minnesota and found positive outcomes for participants and their relationships with their children after taking the classes. Cooke (1992) found that most families

observed positive behavior changes in themselves and their children. Specifically, Cooke found that families felt the children improved their language development and social interaction skills, which are acknowledged as Kindergarten and school readiness.

It is evident that parental involvement affects children's well-being and education. The significance of the parent's role should be emphasized, celebrated, and uplifted in parent education classes, which involve all parents, including BIPOC families. The next section explains the tries and struggles of how ECFE, in particular, has been working towards this intention for many years.

ECFE

This section reviews the brief overview, conception, and history of ECFE. It also addresses their current outreach and collaboration methods and budget issues that are affecting them to this day.

Overview and History of ECFE

There is an approximately 50-year history of the development of ECFE. According to the documents released by the Minnesota Department of Education (2011b), the first ECFE bill was introduced in the Senate in the early 1970s. By 1974, the first pilot program was developed in six sites in Minnesota. These sites were all around the state with racial and social-economical diversity to ensure the development of "broad a constituency of political support as possible" (Harvard Family Research Project, 1990, p. 43). Campbell and Palm (2004) discussed that this initiative also created a professional role for the parent educators teaching in this environment in Minnesota. They had to have a bachelor's degree and a Minnesota teaching license in parent and family education. The

access to the licensure also required upcoming parent educators to student teach for a semester to gain experience.

As the pilot program began, there was evidence to support the effectiveness of parent education; thus, the funding from the state and the federal government increased. By 1992, 384 districts participated in and implemented ECFE programming (MDE, 2011b). Although ECFE is a publicly funded program, utilizing it is voluntary, meaning families can choose not to attend or be selective of the programs they want to participate in. Betty Cooke (1992), a leader in parent education and a former professor at the University of Minnesota, conducted the first research on ECFE between 1990 and 1991. With the funding, she examined how the effective programming of ECFE supported and influenced families.

When looking at various ECFE resources, such as the Parent Education Core Curriculum Framework and Minnesota family education networks, the mission is always clearly stated: "The mission of ECFE is to strengthen the families through the education and support of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth and environment for their children" (MNAFEE, n.d., p. 2). When Cooke (1992) first conducted her qualitative research on the effectiveness of ECFE programming, she found that the majority of the families in the study (parents who are new to the program, married and some single, age range from 20 to 40 years old with some teens), observed positive behavior changes in themselves and with their children. Specifically, families felt that the children improved their language development and social interaction skills, which were stepping stones to school readiness (Cooke, 1992). Due to its success,

follow-up research, the "phase II" study reflecting on the outcomes of lower-income participants, was funded and conducted in 1996.

This "phase II" study, in particular, was well received and an award for "best evaluation" was granted (MDE, 2011b). The evaluation focused on families who were new to ECFE, had lower income (as household income was reported to be less than 30,000 dollars), and had children between the ages of birth to three. Their participation in ECFE resulted in reports of having an awareness of child development, parental confidence, social support, and empathy and understanding toward their children (Mueller, 1996, pp. 82-85). With evaluations and studies reflecting its effectiveness, ECFE was becoming valued and respected in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) works with ECFE to continuously improve its program. In 2011, MDE crafted a five-year project goal between 2014 and 2019 to enhance ECFE programs called ECFE 2.0 (MDE, n.d.). MDE recognized that Minnesota was becoming a diverse state and needed restructuring in ECFE programs, focusing on adapting to the needs of current parents and families, such as their family structures and functions. According to Wikidot for Early Childhood Program Administration website (2018), a site dedicated to ECFE administrators and coordinators, as they approached 2019, MDE revised their goals and created a new five-year project goal that ends in 2024.

It is important to understand the development and history of ECFE to support its mission "to strengthen the families through education and support of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth of their children" (MNAFEE, n.d., p. 2). Acknowledging the intentions demonstrates the importance of

understanding the barriers that affect both BIPOC families, and the efforts being made to alleviate these barriers, and learn ECFE outreach methodologies.

ECFE Outreach Methodologies

ECFE expanded its parent education services beyond group parenting classes. MDE created various recommendations for ECFE to stay connected with their communities and ensure recognition, awareness, and program access. There are several different outreach methodologies listed in the ECFE programming handbook. They also advise, however, for each district to review the cost and budgeting for these outreach methodologies. ECFE programs are voluntary, but outreach should include all communities they serve (MDE, 2011a, p. 1). The most common outreach methods have been word of mouth, information through social media, creating open houses, radio and television advertisements, hospital visits, and door-to-door meet and greets. It is also recommended to provide transportation services for those who do not have access to vehicles (MDE, 2011a). There are several more strategies listed (MDE, 2011a). For example, within the recommendations, one suggests offering in-service training to different organizations, such as childcare staff, elementary school teachers, and human service practitioners by ECFE program staff (MDE, 2011a, p. 5). In this case, the practitioner comes into the organization to teach and advertise the services that can be offered in ECFE. Upon reviewing the list of services offered in the basic program series with parent education/discussion, early childhood education, and parent-child interaction, they list that collaboration with community partners, such as Head Start, Public Health, and Social Services, could be provided (MDE, 2019). MDE recommends evaluating the

group needs and outreach plan often and reassessing how to expand to the community (MDE, 2011a, p. 2).

ECFE Collaboration

Although MDE listed comprehensive outreach methodologies, every district creates annual reports on how it participated in outreach and collaborated with other programs. Wikidot for Early Childhood Program Administration website (2015) defined collaboration as "staff of separate programs actually work together to create a new or enhanced resource for families" (Collaboration). However, "work together" is vague and does not specify how the programs collaborate. In reading Minneapolis district's community "needs assessment" data from 2021, they report a more extensive explanation of their collaboration. They have created two new partnerships with Culturally Congruent Group Prenatal Care (CCGPC) through Hennepin Healthcare and the Me and My Baby program through Urban Ventures. With CCGPC, ECFE provided a parent educator of color to work with the soon-to-be parents of the program and created a "trust-filled relationship development and culturally relevant curriculum, pregnant moms are educated through a healthy pregnancy, strong birth outcomes, and early parenting skills" (MPS ECFE, 2021, p. 1). It is necessary to review each district's community needs assessment data to understand further the districts', coordinators', and parent educators' working definition of collaboration and how it is implemented into their current practice.

An ECFE in Bemidji collaborated with The Village of Hope Homeless Shelter to "break the cycle of homelessness" by providing tools for both parents and children to be successful and offering a culturally appropriate and relevant curriculum for the families served, which were mostly American Indian families (Children's Defense

Fund–Minnesota, 2017). They worked to be creative and offered older children to be

"assistants," so there were ways to include the whole family in the program. By ECFE

being in the shelter as the program, they provided easy access and broke the barrier of

finding transportation that often prevents families from attending (Children's Defense

Fund–Minnesota, 2017, p. 11).

By observing the board meetings of one school district, having discussions with

fellow parent educators and coordinators, and parent education professors, it seems each

district chooses the outreach methods according to their budget and their comfort or

means of "reaching out." This is evident through MDE's needs assessment data for 2019,

2020, and 2021 of varied districts. Each district reported different outreach methods

according to the district's needs and the year. This helps to confirm that there are different

outreach methodologies and implementations that are varied throughout the districts,

which means the inclusion of BIPOC families may differ according to the districts as

well.

Leadership Changes and Budget Cuts

Since the Minnesota ECFE program started in 1985, ECFE has grown every year

with increasing budgets and support from the government (MDE, 2011b). There were

also budgets allocated to provide program evaluation. By 1989, the Minnesota

Legislature approved having two full-time "professional staff" in MDE overseeing early

childhood education and ECFE programs in Minnesota (MDE, 2011b). When reflecting

on this history, Betty Cooke (personal communication, November 30th, 2022), who was

one of the pioneers of creating ECFE when it was first piloted in the late 1980s, discussed

the recruitment process in the 1990s and the valuable resources ECFE staff in St. Paul

had for BIPOC families, particularly Hmong families. She continued to share that more partnerships, outreach workers, family resource centers, and community liaisons were available as part of ECFE. As part of the support for ECFE staff, leaders of ECFE also provided statewide regional in-services twice a year in twelve sites on many topics, including outreach (Betty Cooke, personal communication, November 30th, 2022).

However, this fruitful support and expanding program quickly changed when Minnesota Governor Pawlenty proposed budget cuts in education in 2003 (MDE, 2011b; Minneck, 2003). According to Minneck (2003), Pawlenty's initial proposed budget cut was planned to reduce funding for ECFE by 30 percent. As a result, MDE (2011b) stated that with the proposed cuts, it was suggested "to refer parents to other public and private programs for four and five-year-old children" with funding insufficient to serve all targeted age groups from birth to five years old. However, both the Senate and House of Representatives were able to salvage the cut close to two-thirds of the original proposed cut (Minneck, 2003). This cut, nevertheless, affected ECFE significantly.

The budget cut still affects ECFE programs to this day. Coordinators continue to receive less support and wear more hats, and there has not been a full-time replacement in MDE devoted solely to the Early Childhood and ECFE organization (Heather Cline, personal communication, October 17th, 2022, Betty Cooke, personal communication, November 30th, 2022). However, through the advocacy group and lobbyists from MNAFEE, there are hopes that more support, increased budgets, and leadership will be available through MDE in the future (Betty Cooke, personal communication, November 30th, 2022).

Despite some of the tried collaborative efforts and outreach methodologies, the lasting budget cuts may have created limitations to what the staff can do. Additionally, there are still various barriers that may contribute to general and BIPOC participation in ECFE traditional group classes. Understanding these barriers is also critical to adapting participation and outreach techniques.

Barriers to ECFE Participation

To further learn how to adapt and tailor outreach techniques, this section addresses various possible barriers affecting all families attending ECFE and BIPOC families attending ECFE.

Possible Barriers to Families Attending ECFE

Although research demonstrates the positive effects families have from attending parent education programs, there are also findings that not enough families attend or seek parent education. Winslow et al. (2009) determined that barriers such as childcare, transportation, and prior negative experiences from public support may contribute to the lack of participation in the multi-session parent education programs (pp. 154-155). When there was a grant-funded ECFE expansion program for one year to Kindergarten through 3rd grade, Harding et al. (1991) found that logistical concerns for families (i.e., working family time) or staff (i.e., lack of planning time), as well as communication and family behaviors and lack of awareness towards the program, were some of the barriers listed (pp. 23-25). Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota (2017) also stated that families might have non-standard work schedules and that the lack of transportation or location of the services may be burdensome (p. 8). In detailing these barriers, for example, Teti et al. (2017) stated that people who live in rural areas might lack transportation or time to

transport to the nearest parent education program, and working parents may feel it is a burden rather than beneficial to get to the program; others may be in fear that their parenting style may be reported.

When discussing overall program quality enhancement strategies in ECFE, Keller (2001) noted a few barriers in the program budgets themselves and the availability of time to address the ability to assess and evaluate the districts' programs. In addition to the tight budgets and time, participants in Keller's research stated a need for a better program site and improved outreach work (p. 103).

Some also view parent education classes as an intervention rather than support. Huisman (2019) found from past research that parents were more inclined to enroll in parent education classes when they felt their child had "maladjustment issues" (p. 98). There seems to be a stigma, a view that parent education is for people who need help. As a result, some do not enroll even if they may benefit from it. Along the same lines, Winslow et al. (2009) found that parents who used ineffective parenting strategies tend to stay in parent education programs (p. 154). Thus, those who had reasons to believe they needed more information and support stayed in the parent education programs while others did not.

If there is easy access to information about child development or the positive effects of parent involvement, caregivers may have more tools to try. A study by Graybill et al. (2016) found that when families are informed about developmental milestones, such as through their children's school, parent education classes, booklets, or pamphlets, their participant outcome and support for their children were more responsive than not attending or receiving anything at all (p. 37). Keating et al. (2020) recommended that

policy, services, and support need to reflect the changing demographics of caregivers and

babies, which are becoming more diverse by race, ethnicity, income level, and family

structures. Not enough attention and effort are paid to providing and informing about

early support and education for parents and infants. The services offered are not reaching

out to all families (pp. 17-48).

Possible Barriers to BIPOC Families Attending ECFE

Although parent education programs, in particular ECFE, attempt to reflect the

needs of the community by creating district assessments and providing resources for the

whole community, research revealed that those who participate in ECFE programs are

mostly White families (Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota, 2017). This correlates with

research done by Cooke and Thomas (1985), who found that during the beginning of

ECFE programs, the participants were mostly White (pp. 224-225). In following this

research, Jordan et al. (2018) stated that ECFE served wealthier white children at a higher

rate than all other racial/ethnic groups. As a result, there seems to be a disconnect

between the needs assessment, community responses, and the participants who attend.

There may be a few reasons for this division. The push for educating with certain

parenting styles without knowing the parents' values and the situation in the group

creates a division. For example, Cowan et al. (1998) and Aleksandrov et al. (2016)

indicated that while parent education interventions highlight the use of authoritative

parenting, which highlights warmth and responsiveness, it is perceived to associate and

has a better response for the dominant middle class and White culture; this parenting style

is not universal, and other ethnic groups may find benefits in authoritative parenting style

dependent on the situation and cultural values. Furthermore, Chao (2001) described the

authoritative parenting style to "become the prototype for appropriate parenting. Such acceptance has lead [sic] to the promotion of these qualities in intervention programs, books, and other literature for parents" (p. 1832). In supporting this argument and causation, Winslow et al. (2009) found that "ethnic minority parents" may avoid parent education classes because of the distrust of providers/educators and lack of understanding perceived by the educators and the program (p. 155). Bierman et al. (2017) also stated that families who lack resources and time, and have many burdens, such as single parents, those who live in unsafe living conditions, and those who have a mental illness, may not be as involved in their children's lives and seek information to provide positive parenting practices (p. 4). While this statement is not isolated to BIPOC families, Bierman et al. (2017) continued to report that parent education must be more culturally responsive and understand family background (p. 9). Furthermore, to overcome these barriers, Teti et al. (2017) suggested creating "culturally relevant programs" that lessen the stress, provide support, and develop partnerships between the services and the participants of the community (p. 20). In discussing BIPOC and immigrant families, Aleksandrov et al. (2016) stated that families may adapt, retain, or choose cultural values, customs, and norms for their families depending on the time and place. Thus, it is important to consider how much families' "levels of acculturation and enculturation" are presented (pp. 81-82).

When discussing supporting Black parents, Sullivan (2016) specifically offered advice for educators to "listen to parents. . . Put your own preferences, values, beliefs, and perceptions on hold long enough to get real and valuable information from Black parents" (p. 116). Thinking about the purpose of the study and understanding how to

break the barriers for BIPOC families to attend ECFE, this guidance could be applied to all People of Color when supporting them as parents.

Historical trauma could also be one of the barriers BIPOC families may have in participating in different family services (Allen, 2020; Comas-Diaz, 2016). Allen (2020) stated that the effects of past trauma and stress, such as slavery for African Americans and displacement for Indigenous people, could be passed down to generations and communities, which forms distrust in the systems, such as the educational system and impressions of inferiority in how they are perceived and treated in the world. Additionally, generations of families and communities were and continue to be attacked or rejected because of their culture (Allen, 2020). This can also be amplified or triggered through racial microaggressions, where perpetrators of the microaggression may be unaware of their racist attitudes, conversations, or behaviors with BIPOC people (Comas-Diaz, 2016). Due to this hesitation, it is necessary to have extensive outreach for services to repair relationships and build trust, such as attending and participating in grocery stores, playgrounds, and common areas in the communities (Cortis et al., 2009).

To continue breaking the barriers, Chase and Valorose (2019) suggested creating a trusting relationship where there are no "one size does not fit all" strategies to find ways to seek participants and learn about the families and demographics they serve and "move beyond printed and translated materials and websites" for outreach (p. 1). For example, one of the suggestions to reach younger parents was to use social media, while another was to reach out through trusted community leaders and members of the demographic participants they were trying to reach (Chase & Valorose, 2019, pp. 2-7). Suggestions were also made to offer group classes that include intergenerational participants, such as

grandparents, aunts, and uncles, people who may have cultural influences affecting each other, and the caregivers' parenting styles (Brown, 1995, p. 138).

It is also important to note the barriers that affect immigrant families. For example, Kim (2009) noted that it is necessary to consider "acculturation" and "enculturation" amongst Asian American families when thinking about the cultural norms, adjustments, and barriers that occur when living in a "dominant group" culture (p. 108). Kim (2009) defined "enculturation" as "the process of (re)socializing into and maintaining the norms of the ancestral culture" (p. 110). Yee et al. (2009) defined "acculturation" as "the process of adapting to a new culture that is different from the culture of origin" (p. 310). Yee et al. (2009) further explained the barrier within the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) families, generations, and the level of assimilation through differing roles, acceptance, or rejections of the dominant culture (pp. 298-299). By specifically discussing Hmong women's experience in Minnesota, Brown (1995) explained that Hmong women in the United States struggle to balance their roles in the two cultures and contemplate "How do they remain 'Hmong' and still find a balance between the expectations Americans have for them and the roles they are to uphold within the Hmong community?" (p. 6).

These possible barriers inform how and why parents may not participate in ECFE or other parent education programs. However, examining the parent educator's role in these barriers is also important. The following section will include how parent educators in ECFE programs get their credentials and the expectations of parent educators.

Parent Educators

Parent educators are practitioners who provide parent education (Cooke, 2006).
Campbell and Palm (2004) suggested that positive and helpful parent educators are the
ones who can support the parents to understand their goals and purpose as well as explore
their parenting styles and learn their children's needs while also exploring different
disciplining strategies that can be applied to those situations. They can be social workers,
psychologists, parents, paraprofessionals, or anyone who can offer a short workshop or a
session in the field of parent education (Cooke, 2006). Because of the wide variety of
professions and expertise, there is a controversy on the qualifications and "what they
should know and be able to do" (Cooke, 2006, p. 786). Additionally, Love (2020) stated
that only a "few teacher education programs require their students to take classes in"
BIPOC studies, such as African-American, Latinx, and Native American studies, and are
asked to relate to "students" and families they are teaching or supporting (p. 128). It
seems experience, practice, and education are necessary to become a good parent
educator.

Expectations of a Parent Educator

Given the diversity of family structures, cultures, and values, the demands and
expectations of parent educators are increasing and becoming more involved (Campbell
& Palm, 2004). Goals for parent education are based on current research in child
development, providing information about interaction, transitions, responsive care, and
developmental needs at every stage. It is also expected that education provides
appropriate resources based on the community, which can be assessed through outreach
information (MDE, 2011a, p. 3). Doherty (1995) developed a description of varying

levels of parent-educator involvement during their practice. It ranges from Level One to Level Five, and most educators fluctuate between Level Two and Level Four. Level One discusses the lack of understanding in skill development, and Level Five specifically states that the practice is "outside the boundaries of parent and family education," which further suggests seeking professional support, like a licensed therapist (pp. 354-356). Most parent educators use teaching methods in Level Two and Level Three, which encourage educators to ask questions, communicate information, and involve small and large group discussions. Depending on the circumstances, the involvement intensifies to Level Four if discussions include anger issues with children. However, it is recommended to put limitations on their expectations if the problems begin to bleed into marital problems or other family issues that do not involve children (Doherty, 1995, p. 355). Although Doherty's (1995) level of involvement provides information on the abilities and limits of parent educators, it is worth noting that while therapists have more experience discussing psychological aspects of relationships and personal issues, they may not be able to provide the educational aspects of parenting and family relationships, which parent educators are qualified to do (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). Additionally, because there are many responsibilities involved in being a parent educator, there are also guidelines and codes of ethical thinking to consider in involving themselves with families, especially when addressing cultural dilemmas and conflicts between personal, school, and family values (Alden et al., 2009). It takes a lot of skills and practice to learn how to balance the differing roles, practice, and provide respect when working with families with different beliefs and values.

Due to the involvement of adults in the education of parents, Miller (1994) discussed the key difference in training, which encourages educators to use their skills as facilitators to guide participants to share their experiences rather than to educate them (p. 42). Additionally, Miller (1994) cautioned that knowing the audience is important in facilitating the group. For example, if the participants make up an all-White German Catholic group, parent discussions focusing on ethnicity, culture, or religious differences may not be applicable (pp. 45-46). Although Paley (2000) often reflected on and discussed her role as a teacher with children, her reflection about her educator role and duality resonates with the roles of parent educators: "The role of the teacher changes. From the often negative function of judge and jury, the teacher can rise to the far more useful and satisfying position of a friend" (p. xix). Parent educators are expected to be flexible, strategic, and open to learning about the diverse families and communities they serve.

Becoming a Parent Educator

There are different ways to become a parent educator. According to Cooke (2006), the qualifications to become a parent educator are diverse. There are many different career paths on how practitioners become parent educators (pp. 1-2). However, Minnesota is the only state to require a parent education license to work in ECFE programs (Cooke, 2006, p. 795). By recognizing the need and diversification of the parent educators, although there are four institutions offering parent education licensure programs, UMN Twin Cities changed their licensure and certification program to be an online program to provide access for more people in the state, out-of-state, and international countries (Cooke, 2006, p. 796). As someone who experienced this online

licensure program, it was evident that this method of online classes supported many students who were more available on weeknights and lived out of state. Although obtaining licensure is more accessible, Miller (1994) cautioned that "licensure alone does not guarantee that outcomes relating to group process skills and abilities will naturally occur" (pp. 42-43). The skill to empathize and relate to families takes time, practice, and reflection.

This theme was included to emphasize a parent educator's critical role in facilitating group classes and understanding the training they receive before teaching adult learners. The role is not taken lightly, and the expectations go beyond marketing in recruiting and retaining participants for ECFE classes.

While it is critical to highlight the ECFE work and credentials it has established over the years, it is also necessary to look into other parent education programs available in Minnesota to compare and understand the other resources they may provide for different communities.

Other Methods and Programs for Parent Education

In Minnesota, there are other parent education services, such as coaching and empowerment and home visiting, which are particularly popular in nonprofit programs, such as Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) and St. Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN) sponsored by the Wilder Foundation. According to NAZ's website introduction in "What We Do" (n.d.), family programs and coaching are made to provide family support to excel in education and come out of generational poverty. In a presentation about a collaboration between the University of Minnesota and NAZ, Wackerle-Hollman and Frazier (2022) revealed a program called "Family Academy," which is a holistic

approach and parent ed/coaching for parents and children. They discussed a class called "College Bound Babies," which focuses on "hardest-to-reach families" to overcome participation in barriers (Wackerle-Hollman & Frazier, personal communication, February 21, 2022). It provides focus group sessions and programs that add layers of support tailored to the community. To engage and reduce the barriers, the program provided transportation, meal prep, childcare, and monetary investment. They also ensured that parent educators were not experts but facilitators with some resources. This skill is important to hone to build trust between the participants (parents) and the parent educator. Being a "facilitator" creates opportunities for "participants to initiate discussions, keep a discussion going by sharing experiences, and allow for a group to grow stronger" and gain trust (Miller, 1994, p. 42).

Another nonprofit organization called Way to Grow described its program as being led by the community with support from the government, nonprofit groups, corporations, families, teachers, and community members. They acknowledged and worked together to address the early childhood education gap in their community (Way to Grow, 2020, p. 8). They provided services such as home visits, prenatal and pregnancy support, and education on child development. Way to Grow (2020) CEO Carolyn Smallwood declared that when necessary, they redirected their services to virtual platforms when the coronavirus 2019 pandemic (COVID-19) hit the world. They even provided academic support for children and families when needed.

According to Thomsen et al. (2017), new parents in SPPN benefit from relationships built between the parent educator and themselves and appreciate resources about parenting given to them. By aligning with the existing generation, Thomsen et al.

(2017) found that texting is also the best way to communicate with new and young families. Parent educators in SPPN also support new immigrants settling in the new county. The families receive information about expectations and the culture of the state and support in learning a new language. Unfortunately, similar to ECFE programs, it is difficult to continue the participation and retention of families in SPPN communities. Emarita (2015) further explained that organizations that support BIPOC communities have created effective practices for their communities; however, their efforts have "not been sufficiently utilized to shape the policies and practices that most affect the well-being of children of color and American Indian children and their families" (p. 5).

It is "critical" and recommended that the "parent educator and the home visiting program accommodate the parent's busy schedule" (Thomsen et al., 2017, pp. 1-4). ECFE includes home visiting as one of its outreach services. For example, according to the Minnesota Department of Education's (MDE, 2021) ECFE needs assessment data in 2020, St. Paul ECFE increased their home visiting services and other services such as transportation.

Information about other nonprofit community parent education services is helpful to compare the similarities and differences between the programs and learn whether collaboration would be one of the ways to alleviate barriers for ECFE programs to include more BIPOC families in group classes.

Room for Improvement in ECFE

Research has shown that parent education benefits children and their families (Cooke, 1992). For example, in one of the most recent published research, Beecher and Van Pay (2020) found that parent education programs effectively provided the parents

and caregivers with more tools and understanding of child development and helped develop the children's language skills in the early years. Families who receive or take parent education have more knowledge and supporting skills for their children.

The parent educator qualifications changed to enhance their services as well. Despite these advances, there needs to be continued improvement in the field. Love (2020) suggested the need for antiracist educators, "Antiracist educators seek to understand the everyday experiences of dark people living, enduring, and resisting White supremacy and White rage" (p. 54). Additionally, there should be more educators of color available for families and children, as this is an issue concerning all institutions of education around the United States. For example, Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota (2017) released an evaluation report for early childhood program access in Minnesota and reported that in 2015, ECFE programs had the least amount of BIPOC participants out of all the early childhood programs, such as Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and district preschools, that were offered in Minnesota. Jordan et al. (2018) stated that ECFE served wealthier white children at a higher rate than all other racial/ethnic groups combined. In a different research, Emarita (2015) from Voices and Choices stated that "families show a marked preference for caregivers who share their culture and values" (p. 9). Emarita recommended that state agencies should work and inquire with community-based organizations and institutions and collaborate "to design and deliver programs and services rather than competing with and displacing them" (Emarita, 2015, p. 10). These recommendations provide new possibilities of how ECFE can collaborate and work with other nonprofit programs that serve their communities, especially if increasing teachers of color or increasing more

BIPOC communities into ECFE programs cannot be accomplished right away due to the systemic structures.

Conclusion

As history shows, parent education has been necessary and pertinent for parents and caregivers for a long time. There is increased research on the subject. More programs have been formed to support parents and caregivers and their children in the early years as the recognition of the importance of family and early childhood care has grown. ECFE was innovative in creating one of the first public programs that also required educators to be licensed. However, like any program, there needs to be further work for improvement. Upon evaluating ECFE programming in Minnesota, the Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota (2017) recommended further refinement for classes to be culturally specific, offering more classes in the evenings or on the weekends, and providing transportation. According to the district community needs assessment data from MDE (2021), although attempts are made with different outreach services, not all ECFE districts offer these recommended services. For ECFE to be more accessible and successful, it is necessary to provide early awareness of ECFE, such as through high schools and various community gatherings. Funding is also critical in creating opportunities for these recommendations. In order to understand the various perspectives of the parent educators and coordinators of different districts, it is important to embark on the research question: *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes? What are the current outreach methodologies that ECFE staff utilize to engage with families throughout the state? What is their collaborative process*

with other programs? These findings will provide a collective resource and support for

ECFE and parent education services and may define some barriers beyond their means.

ECFE and parent education services are crucial, and it is important to make the services

more welcoming, whether through collaboration or partnership with other programs and

educators, to support all families and children to provide positive outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program is a publicly funded parent and family education program serving all families in Minnesota. Although ECFE is a program that is accessible to all, according to Jordan et al. (2018), the program serves more wealthy White children than other racial/ethnic groups (p. 4). Previous chapters addressed the outreach methods attempted by different districts and different barriers that may contribute to preventing BIPOC families from participating in available programs to support and serve their needs. It is essential to learn personal and individual perspectives on how ECFE educators and coordinators work to reach out to BIPOC communities and retain their participation in traditional group classes. This study's research design encourages participants to reflect on their values, efforts, and actions that contribute to increasing BIPOC participation in group classes.

This chapter discusses the methodology, the rationale for the research design, the process, and the data tools used to address the research question: *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?*

Secondary questions are:

- *What are the current outreach methodologies that ECFE staff in Minnesota utilize to engage with families in their own communities?*

- *What is their collaborative process with other community partnerships?*

Research Paradigm and Rationale for Qualitative Approach

Maxwell (2009) stated that the qualitative approach is suitable for "understanding something, gaining some insight into what is going on and why this is happening" (p. 220). On a similar note, Creswell and Posh (2018) also noted that researchers come with various levels of "philosophical assumptions," and this often guides how we gather our data (p. 15). I often find myself valuing personal stories and experiences to gain an understanding of certain phenomena. In this research, the qualitative approach supports the purpose of gaining personal and valuable perspectives of ECFE parent educators and coordinators, their thoughts and experiences in their outreach methodologies, and their perspectives on the attendance of BIPOC parents in group classes.

The qualitative approach also allows personal narratives to flourish and have individualized perspectives and reflections on the participants' experiences while acknowledging the agreed expectations of their roles and responsibilities. Because this research aims to understand the participants' current parent education outreach methodologies and further examine the BIPOC participation in their own traditional ECFE group classes, the qualitative approach could also investigate the additional types of strategies and support ECFE educators and coordinators do to reach more BIPOC communities. When participants are asked to reflect on their experiences in a qualitative approach, it helps them work through reflective practices. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that the impact of qualitative research design has an "ability to transform the world" (p. 8). While this study is localized in Minnesota, the goal is to contribute to the broader early childhood educational community.

Setting and Participants

Since ECFE is known to provide statewide accessibility, the survey data was collected from various districts, including urban, suburban, and rural areas with BIPOC residents. The interviewers were selected through the voluntary checklist on the survey and further narrowed down by splitting the participants into three locations: urban, suburban, and town/rural areas. There was an equal number of participants in each location with a minimum expectation of six participants, at least two from urban, suburban, and town/rural regions, to include the voices of participants from different areas of the state. Participants shared the zip codes of where they work to define whether their regions are in urban, suburban, or town/rural districts.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2022), a large Urban city is defined as having a population of 250,000 or more, a medium urban city to be more than 100,000 and less than 250,000 people, and a small urban city to be less than 100,000 people. In Minnesota and this research, the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) are considered large urban cities, and cities like Rochester and Duluth will be considered small urban cities. The surrounding suburban areas are small to medium-sized suburbs. Because of the structure of Minnesota, there will be more medium and small suburbs with a population of fewer than 100,000 people and 250,000 people, rather than a large suburban area considered to have a population of 250,000 or more. Minnesota has several well-known small towns with immediate surrounding rural areas. Fringe, distance, and remote towns could be in an urban cluster between 10 to 35 miles from an urbanized area, which is a broad range. Rural areas also have three similar categories as the "towns:" fringe, distant, and remote. All three rural areas will be considered as rural

in this study as the range of distance is "less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster," to "more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster" (NCES, 2022, p. 1). For this study, and the similarities and the broad ranges of towns and rural areas in Minnesota, towns and rural areas will be regarded as one when categorizing the regions.

I recruited participants through various avenues, such as through Facebook communities (i.e., Friends of Family Education, Peer-fect connections), word of mouth, MNAFEE Board Members, the University of Minnesota Parent Education alumnus listserv, past Hamline EdD alumnus who works in the ECFE field, and ECFE wikilink administrative email listserv. ECFE has a lot of committed educators and staff who want to support each other and the mission of their program, which is "to strengthen the families through education and support of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth of their children" (MNAFEE, n.d., p. 2). Depending on the districts, there are ECFE coordinators, classroom educators, a secretary, parent educators, paraprofessionals/teacher assistants, and volunteers. Depending on the size of the ECFE site, additional staff may include an outreach supervisor, a site supervisor, and other office support staff (Cooke et al., 2001). According to Cooke et al. (2001), ECFE coordinators are "generally responsible for running the program. This includes determining the budget, hiring staff, and planning and evaluating programming" (Chapter 10, p. 1). ECFE coordinators, outreach coordinators, or parent educators, those who have the role of providing and arranging outreach coordination and services, will be selected for the surveying and interviewing data. Since there are roughly 300 districts and parent

education programs in these areas, the goal is to send the survey to at least one coordinator or parent educator from each district and receive a minimum of 75 surveys back, with a minimum of 20 participants per region response (urban, suburban, and rural). Interview participants will be determined from the voluntary checklist in the survey and selected equally from each region.

Data Collection

The qualitative research design supports two data collection tools, a survey and an interview, which will suit this research. Both tools will help me answer my research question. The proposed questions will be relevant to the objectives, motivating the participants to answer them (Gorden, 1992, p. 9). In order to encourage participants to continue momentum and motivation and efficiently answer the survey questions, most of the questions are closed-ended questions, Likert-type scales, or checklists. Open-ended questions are available as an option in surveys and conducted further in interviews with ECFE parent educators and program coordinators. The questions will focus on their experience in the outreach process and recruiting and retaining BIPOC participants for traditional group classes. Maxwell (2009) informed how "process questions" help participants answer "how and why things happen" (p. 232). These questions would be helpful to find the experiences and details of each participant.

Survey

A survey will be used as one of the data collection methods. Fink (2017) described surveys as "information collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior" (p. 2). This method is suitable for this research because the goal is to understand the

current methodologies of parent education outreach and collaboration with other programs, such as BIPOC communities. The survey will describe individual or program behavior in how outreach is conducted (see Appendix A).

The survey was developed with mostly multiple choice answers or a Likert scale that addresses ECFE coordinators' and educators' activity and satisfaction levels. There is also room to include more information. In order to design sufficient survey questions, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested predetermining how the survey results will be used (p. 236). The research questions and the secondary questions guided the survey questions. The themes from the literature review, the roles of the parent educators, and known barriers also supported the development of the questions. Questions were designed and revised through consulting with colleagues and professors in the field. A pilot test was conducted to determine if the questions were specific enough to establish answers that could be analyzed.

I sent the survey out through the online survey platform since all ECFE coordinators and educators have access to email and the Internet. The survey was sent statewide through three avenues: the administrative ECFE emails located through MDE ECFE administrative listserve, the Facebook ECFE educator support group, and MNAFEE board members related to the ECFE communities. I created the questions and sent out the survey through the Google form. The forms allowed me to use a spreadsheet of responses for analyzing and organizing later in the process. In the survey, participants had the option to be included in the interview. Those willing to participate in an interview were contacted by email or phone.

Interview

An interview was used as another data collection method (see Appendix B). Interviews were scheduled after the surveys were completed. ECFE coordinators and educators were requested to volunteer on the survey. There is an interpersonal quality to an interview, as Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) reasoned that qualitative interviews are used to understand the "subjects' point of view" and their experiences (p. 3). In this research, to understand the coordinators' and educators' outreach methods and perspectives on their efforts, interviewing their experiences and practices suited well. Additionally, qualitative interviews offer flexibility but active decision-making on the interviewer on when to include additional questions that are not planned (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 19). Furthermore, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that interviews support "establishing trust, being genuine," and making connections with people that bring the connection to "elicit more valid data than a rigid approach" (p. 357). I wanted to bring that quality to this research.

Gordon (1992) stated, "Only when objectives are clear is it possible to formulate relevant questions, evaluate the relevance of responses, or probe effectively for greater relevance" (p. 11). Interview questions were formulated carefully by referring to my research objectives, creating general questions and then specific ones that pertain to the research question, and piloting some of the interview questions with a few ECFE educators and coordinators. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also advised to consider the order of the questions, as they may change the mood or the interviewee's willingness. Gordon (1992) further suggested that "the interviewer breaks the general topic down into specific categories of information that are needed to achieve the objectives of the

interview" (pp. 16-17). These specific methods helped organize, categorize, and understand the purpose of the interview questions.

I took into consideration the many logistics to address in creating an interview. There are several methods to interview at this age in 2023. For example, there are in-person, virtual, phone, or written interviews. To support the participants' schedule by not including commuting time and to meet the goal of being personal and to understand the person's experiences, the interviews were conducted virtually. The virtual interviews were the best alternative to in-person interviews as they allowed me to observe their actions while on screen, such as their body language, quirks, habits, and nuances while listening to their answers and stories. Additionally, the environment was arranged where the interviewee felt most comfortable and where the recording would be clear (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 119). A confidentiality agreement was created through informed consent so the participants in the study were protected and understood that only the researcher would have access to the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 93).

The interview participants were determined from the voluntary checklist in the survey and selected equally from each region: urban, suburban, and rural. While the hope was that the majority wanted to be interviewed, after sorting the regions, participants were split into equal amounts from each location with a minimum expectation of six participants, at least two participants from urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Data Analysis

Fink (2017) warned that analyzing and interpreting a survey could be complex. In order to prevent the least amount of error with a large number of participants, data is best analyzed, scored, or interpreted through the prepared close-ended questions, checklists,

and Likert-type scales (p. 40). A pilot study was conducted for both survey and interview questions to identify the need to adjust or change the questions to help improve the quality and purpose of the questions for later analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) reported that surveys are considered "credible information from a large population" (p. 236), which will support my intent to send the survey to at least 300 participants who are representatives of each district in Minnesota.

Once the survey results were collected, there was a search for "nonrespondents" to search for bias in the question or biased group of respondents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 240). The survey results also supported answering the research questions and allowed me to code, quantify, and categorize the results. To understand the respondent's answer and provide validity of interpretations, during the interview, some of the same questions were asked again with the researcher's summarized interpretation to understand and confirm the interviewer's point of view (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 221).

Similar to the survey analysis, interview data was analyzed through coding. I intentionally looked for themes and patterns in their language. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) mentioned that it takes a lot of craft and techniques to analyze and conduct an informative interview.

When data was collected for the interview, the transcripts were cross-referenced with the respondents' survey answers. While I made meaning and sense of the survey and interview data using the inductive analysis, I considered deductive coding with possible predetermined themes, such as relationships, support, and budgeting, in the analysis, as

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) noted. Coding was primarily used to understand the emerging themes, patterns, and results of the participants' experience and feelings on their current practice in outreach and alleviating barriers to include more BIPOC families (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 227). In processing this technique, there was a chance that "the interpreter goes beyond what is directly said to work out structures and relations of meanings not immediately apparent in a text" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 235). For this reason, it was important to be objective when analyzing interview data for the sake of accuracy of interpretation. Strong attention was paid to avoiding "biased subjectivity" by only looking at specific evidence that supports my research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 241).

Participants were expected to complete the survey data within three weeks after it was sent out in the Spring of 2023. There were reminders sent each week for those who missed the initial request. There were two weeks to sort the data into regional categories and contact the interviewers. The interview date and time were scheduled soon after the survey collection in the spring of 2023, as most ECFE coordinators and educators go on summer break after mid-May. After the interviews were completed, the data analysis occurred during the summer of 2023.

Institutional Research Approval

Since the research involved human participants, it was necessary to be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through Hamline University to proceed with this research. The IRB application and the associated consent form were approved on November 22, 2022, to complete the research. The approved consent form and the survey

were initially sent to at least 300 parent educators and outreach coordinators during the week of February 3, 2023.

Conclusion

In order to learn personal and individual perspectives on how ECFE educators and coordinators work to reach out to BIPOC communities and retain their participation in traditional group classes, the research design was created for the educators and coordinators to reflect on their values while also addressing the efforts, attempts, and actions as they made to increase BIPOC participants in the group classes. To address the research question, *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?* And secondary questions: *What are the current outreach methodologies that ECFE staff in Minnesota utilize to engage with families in their own communities? What is their collaborative process with other community partnerships?* In order to learn and understand the experience of ECFE and parent educators and program coordinators' outreach methodologies, it was determined that interviews and surveys were the best primary data tools. In choosing a qualitative research design, Maxwell (2009) stated that the qualitative research approach provides the ability to center on "situations and people" (p. 30). These methods also brought insight into the research participants' experience and thoughts on their efforts to recruit and retain BIPOC participants for group classes.

Chapter four provides data analysis and research findings from the survey and interviews. Researcher notes, discoveries from the data, stages of coding, and interpretation are addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the survey and interview results, addressing the primary

research question: *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers*

to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in

traditional group classes? And secondary questions: *What are the current outreach*

methodologies that ECFE staff in Minnesota utilize to engage with families in their own

communities? What is their collaborative process with other community partnerships?

This research aims to understand the current methodologies of parent education outreach

and examine BIPOC participation in traditional ECFE group classes. The survey and

interview questions encouraged participants to reflect on their contribution to increasing

BIPOC participation in the group classes.

I utilized a survey as one of the data collection methods to understand the current

methodologies of parent education outreach, specifically targeting BIPOC communities,

and reach as many staff who work on outreach in ECFE as possible since there are at

least 300 districts in Minnesota. Voluntary interviews were conducted to learn and

understand personal stories and experiences in the outreach work. Out of just over 300

districts, the goal was to receive 75 completed surveys, with a minimum of 20

respondents per region (urban, suburban, and rural). There were 107 participants who

started the survey, and 91 (85%) consented and said "yes" to continue the survey, while

others (15%) did not. Of the 91 participants, 83 identified themselves as White (91.2%)

and eight participants (8.8%) as BIPOC. The results are similar to Love's (2020)

statement that 88% of all teachers in the United States are White (p. 131). Participants

were asked to share their working zip codes in the third survey question. Following the

NCES (2022) definition of urban, suburban, and town/rural, I determined that 15

participants were from urban, 20 were from suburban, and 56 were from town/rural areas.

Of those who consented to the interview, three participants from each region were

selected for the interview, with nine interviews in total.

The data information and analysis of this chapter will be organized by section and

themes from the survey and the interviews.

Survey Results

The survey (see Appendix A) was first sent out with an email cover letter (see

Appendix C) on February 6, 2023, through various avenues, such as the MDE ECFE

administrative listserv, Facebook ECFE educator support group, University of Minnesota

Family Social Science alumni group, and MNAFEE board members. The reminders were

given every ten days until the surveys closed on March 10, 2023. Given the commitment

and passion I have observed and heard about from the ECFE community, I was confident

I would receive a minimum of 75 responses. There were high response rates from the

rural/town areas representing a broad spectrum of Minnesota, which was not anticipated

but highly informative, and a lower completion response rate from urban and suburban

areas.

In order to analyze and follow the results cohesively, the survey results are broken

down into four sections: The participants' experiences in ECFE and BIPOC families'

participation, the participants' outreach methodologies incorporating BIPOC

communities, barriers, and the participants' collaborative strategies including BIPOC communities. The survey questions led to the groupings of these four themes.

Participants' Experiences in ECFE and BIPOC Participation

The following survey questions asked about the participants' experience in ECFE (Q5), how long they worked in their district (Q3), their confidence level in knowing their working district (Q4), and years of experience in the ECFE position or related role (Q8). This helped me determine their experience level and confidence in knowing their district before moving forward in answering the specific questions. According to survey question four, 85 out of 91 participants felt they knew their working district really well. At least 50% worked in their current district for over eight years (see Figure 1). Nearly 75% of the participants have worked in ECFE for over five years (see Figure 2). Most participants have worked in the ECFE position or related role for over five years, with the highest percentage working for over 20 years (see Figure 3).

Figure 1

Survey Question 3: How Long Have You Worked in the Current District?
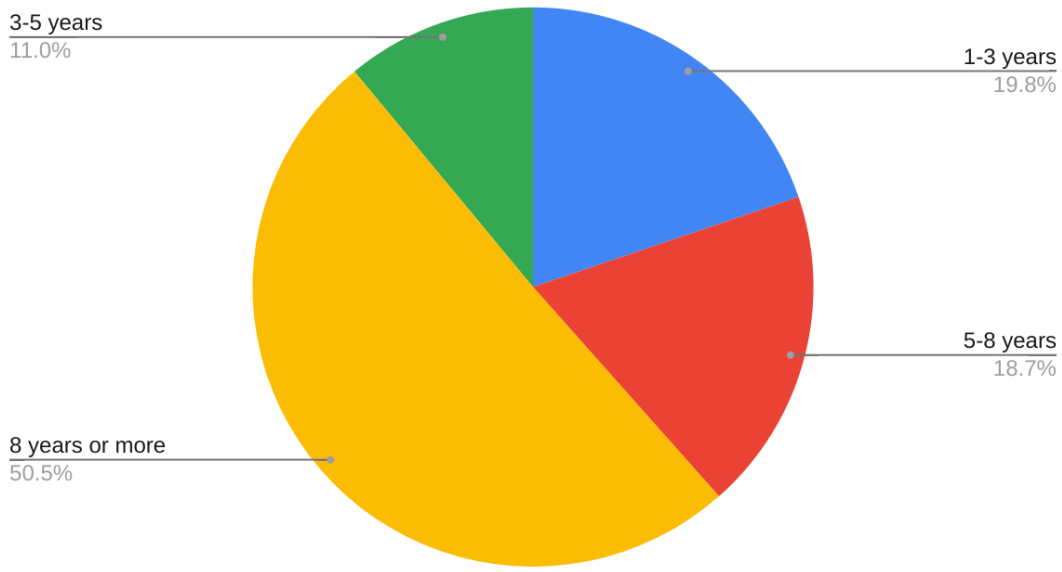
It helps to know that the majority of the participants in this survey have a long

relationship with the current working district to answer the questions about their

experience and outreach methods.

Figure 2

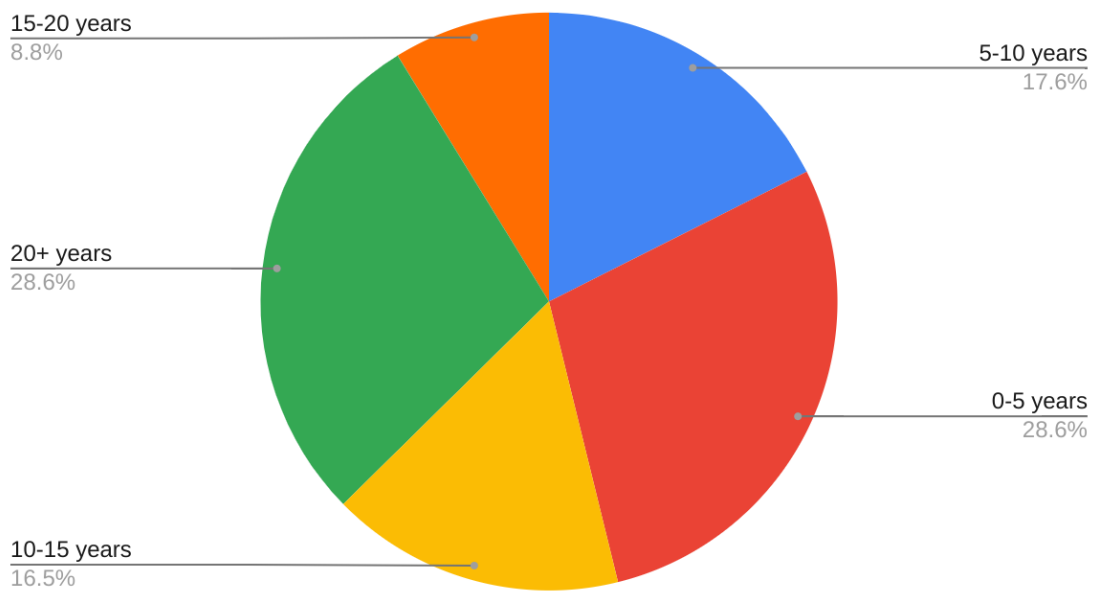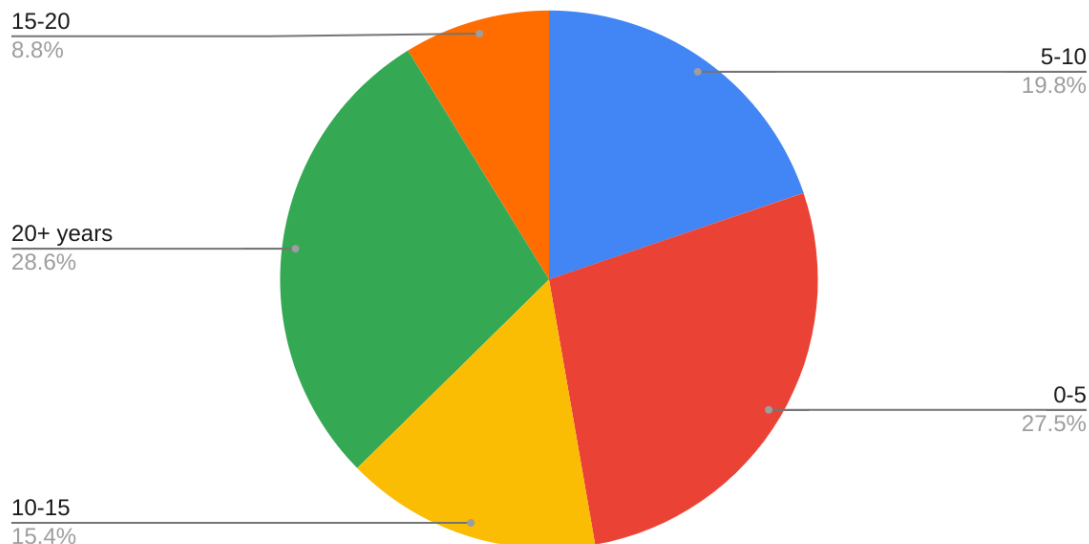*Survey Question 5: How Long Have You Worked in the General ECFE Program?*

Figure 2 demonstrates the long-standing experience most participants have in the

general ECFE program. Their knowledge brings a variety of experiences and

understanding of how ECFE works.

Figure 3

Survey Question 8: How Many Years of Experience Do You Have in an ECFE Position Or Related Role?

The participants' years of experience in their positions give insight into the various roles they take on when thinking about how to include more BIPOC families in their ECFE district.

When asked whether the survey participant doing the outreach was someone from the inner ECFE circle who understood the history and roles of ECFE or outside of the field, survey question six helped determine that 84 out of 91 participants (92.3%) have also been an ECFE parent educator or coordinator at some point in their careers. To further understand who is taking the survey, survey question seven asked about their current role in ECFE. The survey question allowed the selection of multiple job titles and opened space for inserting their title role that may have differed from the choices that were given (n=148). The majority of the participants selected Enrollment Coordinator (30.8%), Outreach Coordinator (25.3%), Classroom Teacher (22%), and Parent Educator

(35.2%). The rest of the titles varied among the participants and districts, including Early

Childhood Coordinator (4.4%) and Program Coordinator (4.4%), and other titles and

roles such as ECFE Administrator and Coordinator and Family Services and Education

Director, which were all 1.1%. From the data, most survey participants have been

involved in ECFE for some time and have more experience and understanding of the field

other than outreach.

There were survey questions relating to understanding the offerings of ECFE

classes. The following questions focused on understanding the types of traditional group

classes and how often they were offered in their district. The questions also included

findings on the attendance of BIPOC families. Survey question 10 asked about the types

of traditional group classes provided in their district (see Table 1). The participants were

allowed to click on more than one class they offered, which resulted in n=177 responses.

The majority, 91.2%, offered different age classes. Survey question nine shows that most

classes are taught zero to five times per week (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Survey Question 9: How Many Traditional Group Parent Education Classes Are Offered/Taught Per Week?
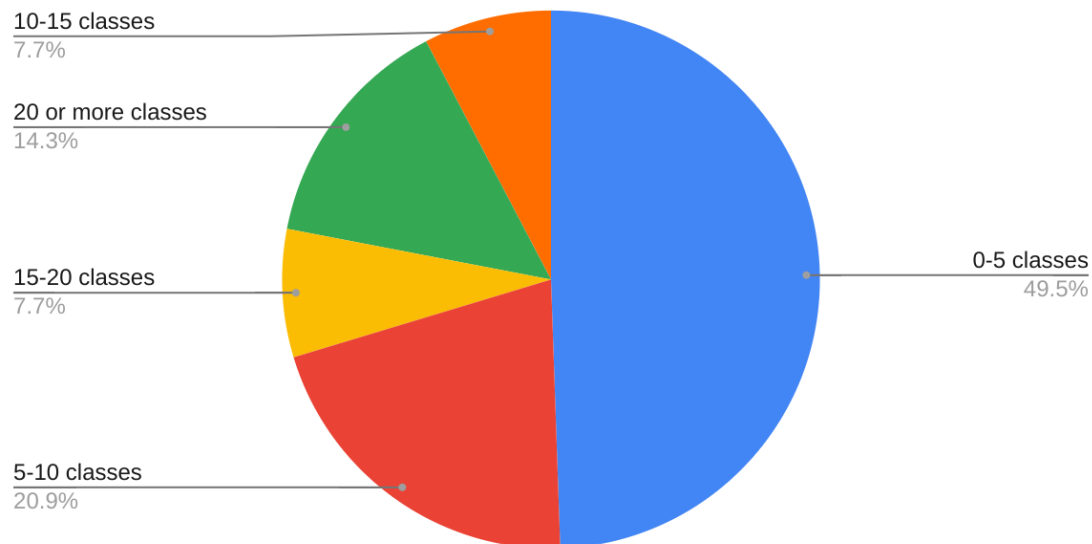
This question helped me to understand the number of group classes offered and provided opportunities for the participants to begin reflecting on how many BIPOC families are in each of those group classes.

Table 1

Survey Question 10 (n=178): What Types of Traditional Group Classes are Offered in Your District?
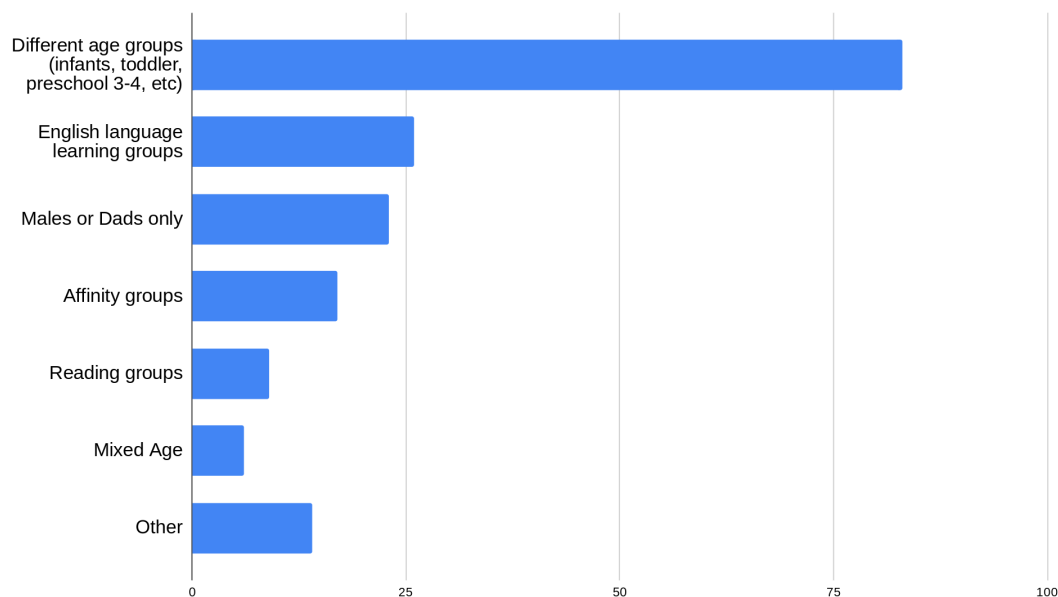

This question also provided the opportunity for participants to reflect on how the offered topics affect who participates in them. "Reading groups" are defined as groups that gather to read, discuss, and study the same book. "Affinity groups" in ECFE are defined as groups that share an identity and find common relations. "Mixed-age" is often a class that involves families with children between zero and five years old.

Survey question 11 asked about the average number of parents attending the classes (see Figure 5). The majority (56%) was five to ten adults; however, there is a discrepancy in this answer. Some needed clarification on whether the question was about the average number of parents in all classes they offer in a semester or the average number of parents per class.

Figure 5

*Survey Question 11: How Many Parents Attend Your Traditional Group Classes (Average)?*
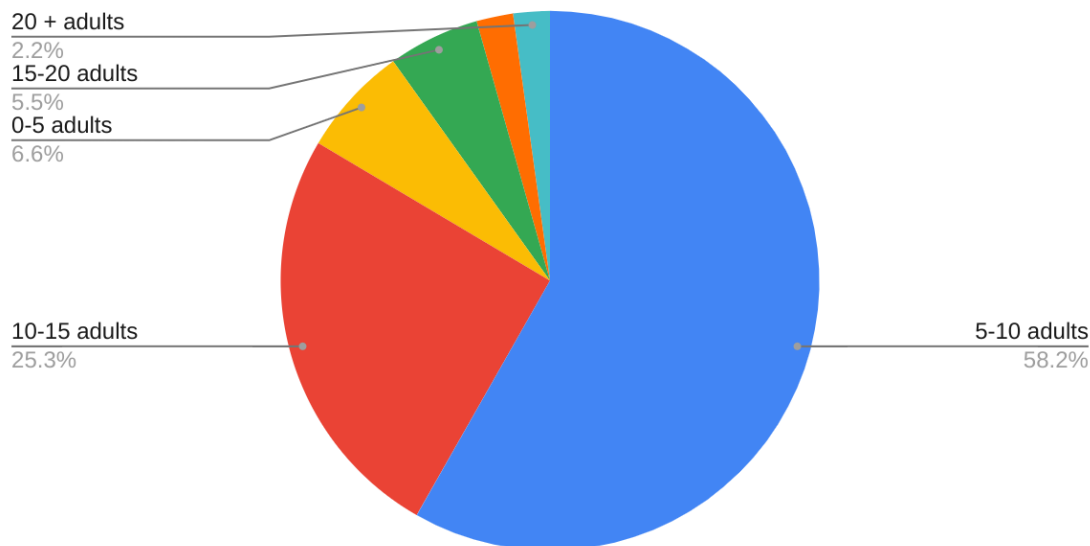
Observing the results, the purpose of this question is clear to most, as I also have seen five to ten adults per class. It is important to note that some results may have been altered if the question had been more precise. As an example, the classes with "15-20 adults" or "20+ adults" may have altered to "5-10 adults" if they understood the question to be per one class.

Survey question 12 asked about the percentage of the BIPOC parents represented in each traditional group class that is not in affinity groups (see Figure 6). This question helped further understand BIPOC families' attendance on average. I found a relationship between this result and the evaluation report from Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota (2017) that the participants who attended ECFE before Kindergarten were 79% White. The participants understood that the BIPOC attendance in ECFE does not represent their district community (see Figure 7).

Figure 6

Survey Question 12: On Average, What Percentage of BIPOC Parents Are Represented in Each Traditional Group Class That Are Not In Specific Affinity Groups?
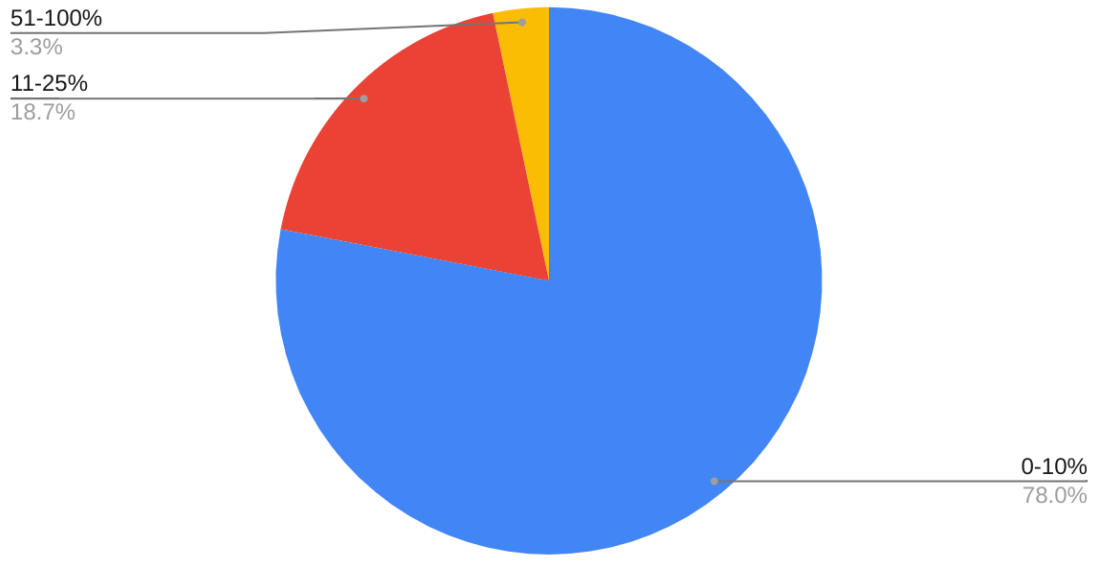
The result of this question showed a gap in numbers between the BIPOC attendance in group class ECFE that are not specific affinity groups and the district BIPOC community numbers that could possibly be attending ECFE.

Figure 7

Survey Question 18: I Believe the Number of BIPOC Families Attending Group Classes Is Representative of the District Community.
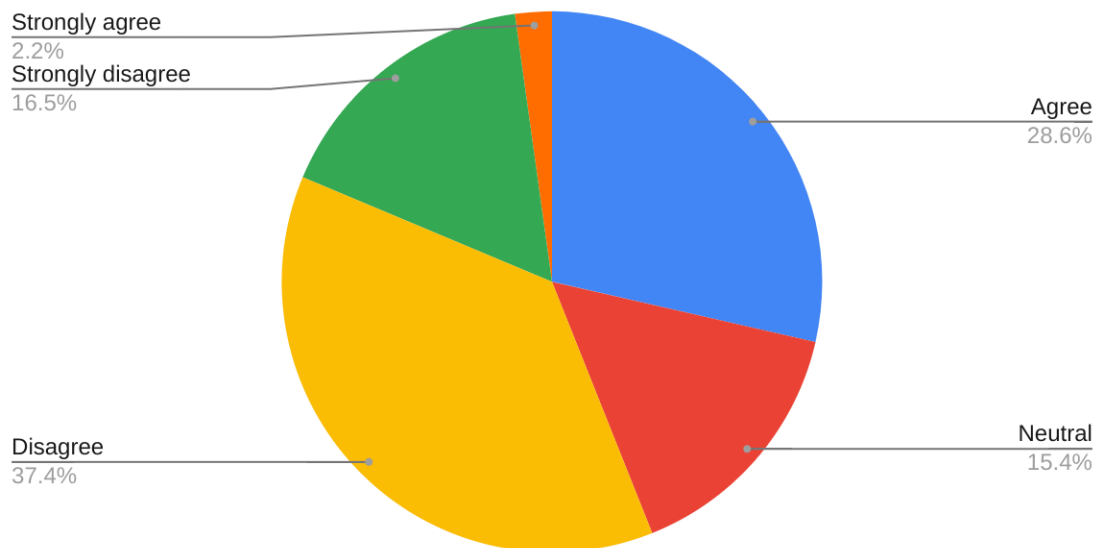
These results helped to understand the types of classes all the families are offered to participate in. The purpose of these questions was to encourage participants to begin thinking about whether the ratio of the current BIPOC attendance in ECFE aligned with the district's BIPOC population.

The follow-up survey question addressed whether the participants or the program felt they were making efforts to engage BIPOC families, which the majority of the participants felt they were (see Figure 8). Reflecting on their actions or inactions to include BIPOC families was a good segue to ask questions about the different types of barriers BIPOC families may be experiencing.

Figure 8

Survey Question 13: I Am/My Program is Making Efforts to Engage BIPOC Families.
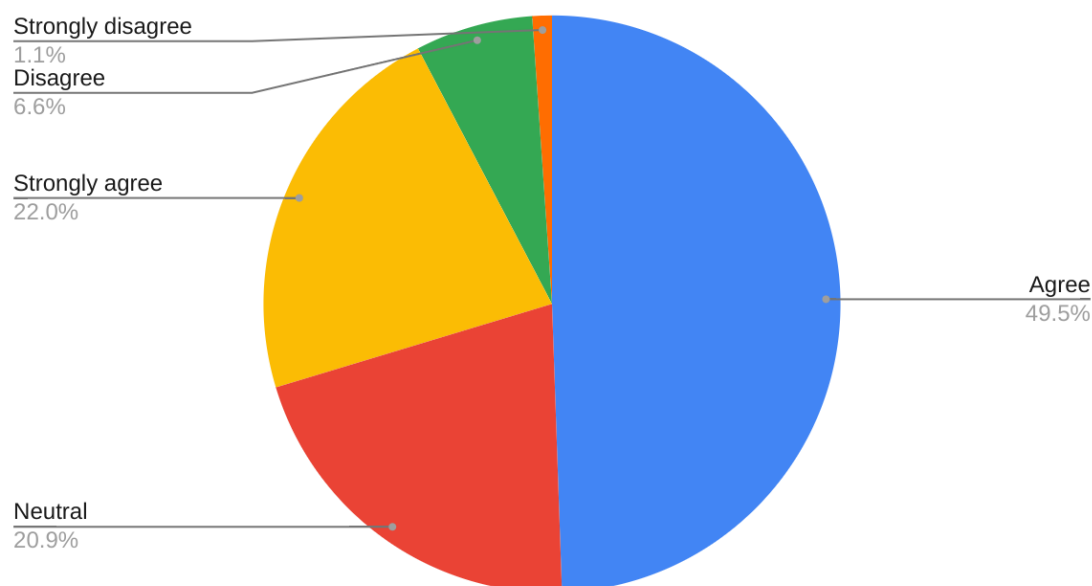
It is clear that most of the participants are aware of the gap and express that they are working to engage BIPOC families.

Barriers

There are many different types of barriers that families experience in attending ECFE classes. Including questions from the participants' experiences and perspectives was important to support the research question: *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?* Survey question 14 asked the participants to share their ideas and thoughts on the barriers. Because participants could select more than one answer, even though there were only 91 participants, there were n=242 responses. While most of the barriers reflected common barriers listed in the

literature review, such as transportation and lack of information, participants also

expressed other thoughts (see Table 2).

Table 2

Survey Question 14 (n=242): What Do You Think Are Barriers That Prevent BIPOC Families From Attending the Traditional Group Classes?
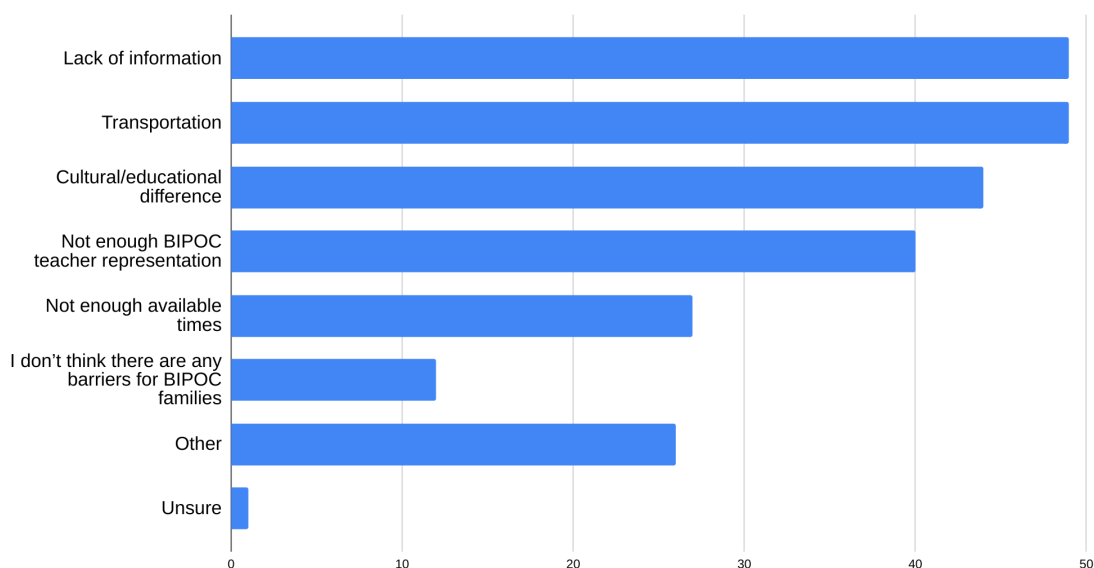
By reading the results in Table 2, it is clear that many participants felt the lack of

BIPOC teacher representation is one of the significant barriers. Some of the "other"

comments included language barriers, conflicting work schedules, and not many BIPOC

families living in the community. There were two participants who commented on the

dominance of White culture in ECFE, as highlighted by one of the statements, "ECFE is

a very White culture program. We struggle to adapt the curriculum to meet different

parenting styles of other cultures." Survey question 22 asked how many BIPOC parent

educators were in their districts' ECFE. The majority of survey respondents, 75.3%, have

zero BIPOC parent educators (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Survey Question 22: How Many BIPOC Parent Educators Are Available In Your Program?
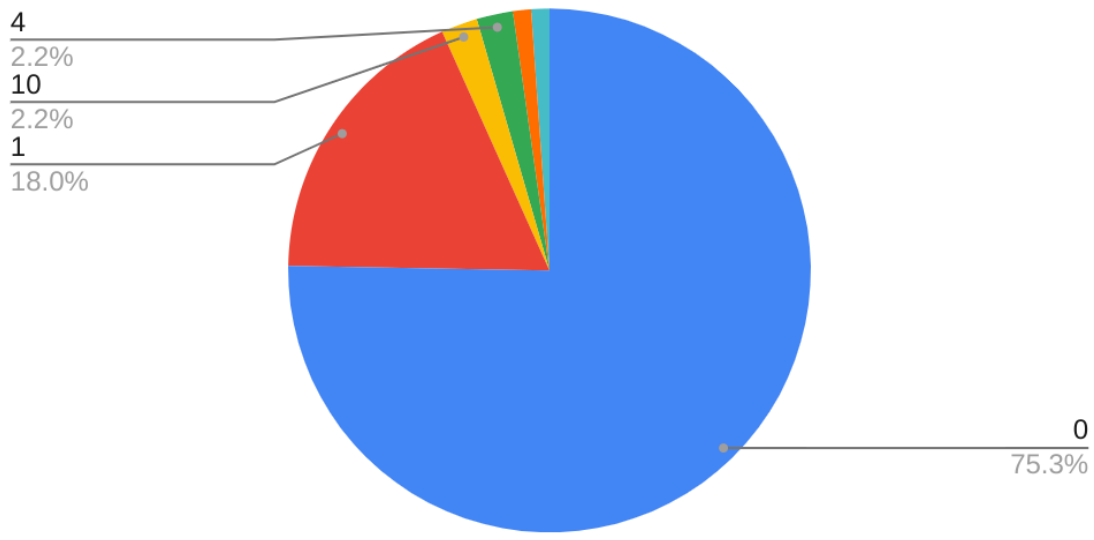
The result is clear that there are not many BIPOC parent educators representing the ECFE program.

The next question asked about the times the classes were offered. The "Neutral" answers had stipulations added to their answers, such as the lack of staff, space, budget, and time; this was often followed with the statement, "We try our best" with the given circumstances (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Survey Question 17: I Believe Our ECFE Program Provides the Times Conducive For All Community Members.
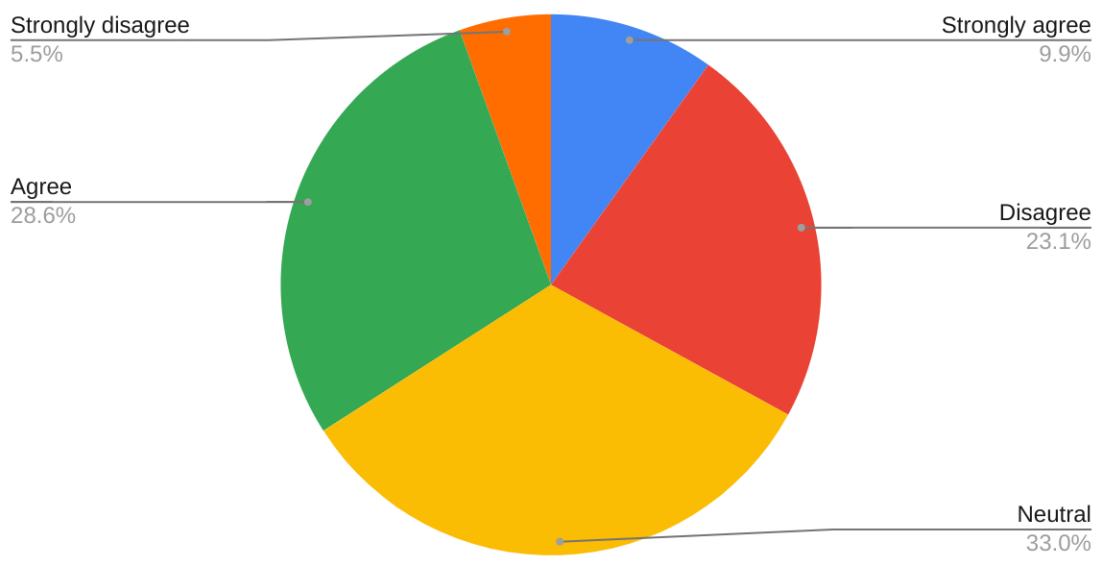
It is clear from the results that participants have issues with the timing of the classes but have various district-specific reasons for providing available times.

It is known that the budgets and their allocation for transportation vary for some districts. Survey question 20 asked if participants knew if everyone in the district who does not have transportation is offered transportation (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Survey Question 20: I Believe We Provide Transportation and Support for Those Who Need Transportation.
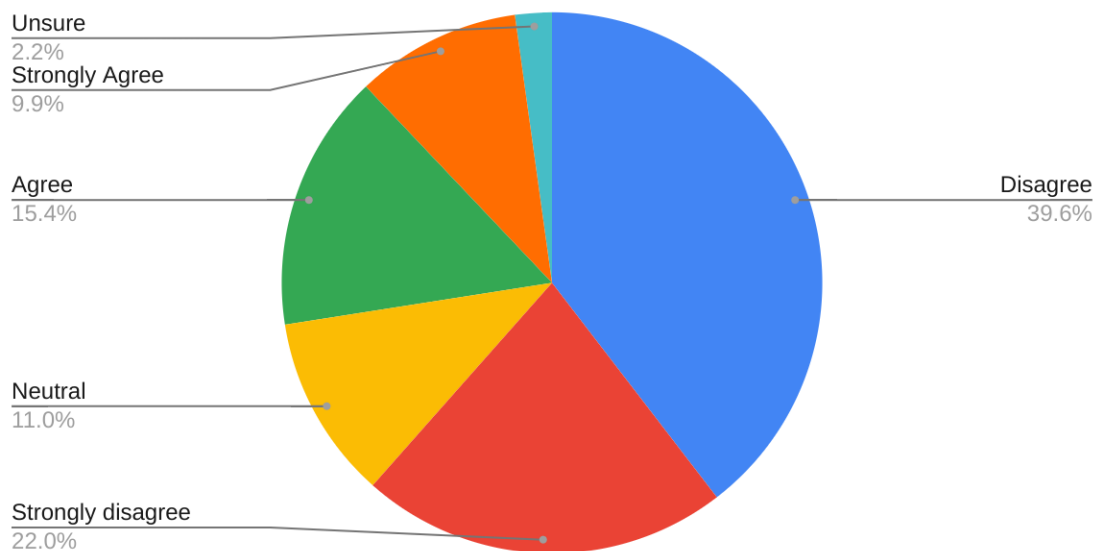
Most participants answered that they disagree (39.6%) or strongly disagree (22%) with being able to provide transportation for those who need it. This lack of service is seen as a strong barrier for many, including BIPOC families, who may want to join ECFE but do not have access to transportation to participate.

Survey question 15 addressed whether the respondents have thoughts or have implemented actions to counter the barriers. Even though they have thought about them, as stated earlier, budgets and times were issues for the majority of participants. The "other" reasons varied as some stated that there is "very little diversity in their community" and they are "always looking for ways to reach all families in their community." Some "other" comments included wanting a bilingual parent educator, hiring a liaison, or having a bus or van dedicated to outreach (see Table 3).

Table 3

Survey Question 15: Would You Do Something Specific At Your Site to Counter the Barriers?
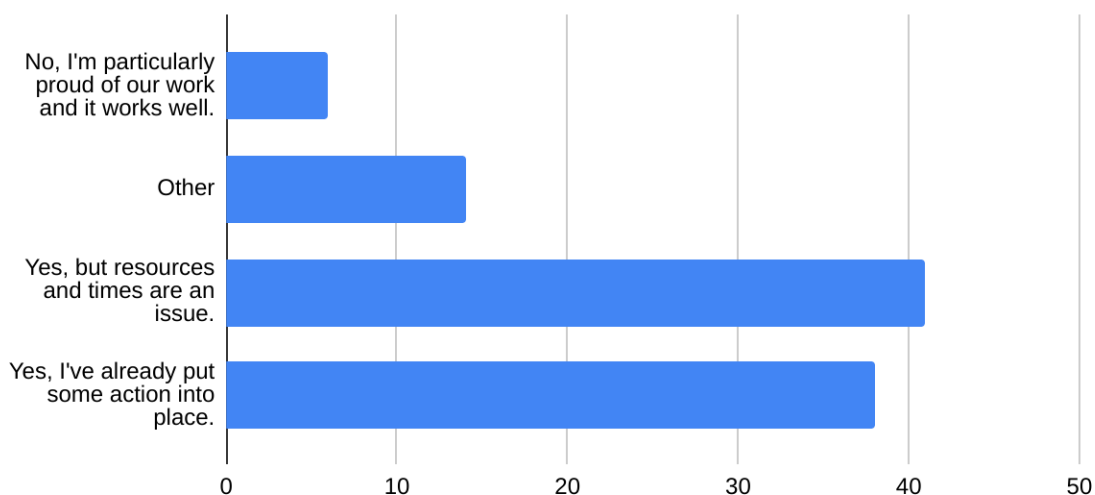
For those who chose "I've already put some action into place," the participants proudly shared some examples of their success stories in the open-ended survey response. For example, the following story discusses how the participant's ECFE program utilized their data to make an informed decision about how to offer their classes:

Before COVID, our ECFE program hosted classes at three of our multifamily communities. Our student data showed that 2/3 of our students of color in our district live in multifamily communities. The onsite classes helped families get to know our staff and feel comfortable eventually taking an ECFE class [in their location] or registering their child for preschool.

They seem to have created trust between the staff and the families to provide further services and opportunities for the families.

The next participant shared the variety of offerings they provided for families:

We have created a Parenting for Racial Justice Class. We are trying to disseminate class/event information to families in a variety of different modalities. We are

offering some classes online, in-person at various locations in the district, night classes, and Saturday classes/events.

Having different options for parent education classes and offering a "Parenting for Racial Justice Class" provides opportunities for BIPOC and White families to be aware of the district's attempts to be more inclusive.

The following story discussed how the staff built trust with the families. "Building a relationship with a staff member first (ex. having a home visit from ECFE), and then having that staff meet the family at an ECFE class for a warm handoff. Relationships are key." Many success stories have discussed the importance of building a relationship with families first.

One participant offered three strategies of their success stories in reaching out to BIPOC families:

1) We're partnering with a nonprofit who is having great success attracting BIPOC families. Staff from both organizations work an ECFE class and a separate playtime. 2) Staffing and attending as many community events as possible. After doing this for 2-3 years, we are invited to more events than we can attend. 3) Networking with other outreach staff that work with cities and nonprofits.

It is clear that participants have been utilizing their networks and putting time into building relationships with them.

This last participant shared in their survey the variety of offerings they have done in their district.

Anecdotally, we have increased the number of BIPOC families that attend "traditional" ECFE. We have offered topics that we think are relatable, have some

staff of color, though not enough, continually have conversations that check not only our intention but our impact. We have a partnership with the American Indian Ed program/Indigenous Peoples community, which is a both/and result. Families attend "traditional" ECFE and participate in affinity groups 6 times a year. The courses/topics offered that we think are helpful include "Raising Multi-Lingual Children," "Parenting Across Cultures," and "Tackling Tough Topics," to name a few. We do parent evaluation surveys and offer interpreters in classes when requested. We pay attention to the environment, though not as consistently as we would like. Parents of color have commented on the materials as diverse and able to see themselves in the classroom environment.

It was clear they had conversations with the BIPOC families for their feedback and ideas on how to improve their programming.

Outreach Methodologies, Incorporating BIPOC Communities

When sending out the survey, it was vital for me to find out what the districts or the participants do for outreach, especially when working to include BIPOC communities. Survey question 19 asked participants if they believed they provided enough information to all the community members their district represents (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Survey Question 19: I Believe Our ECFE Provides Enough Information About ECFE to the Community it Represents.
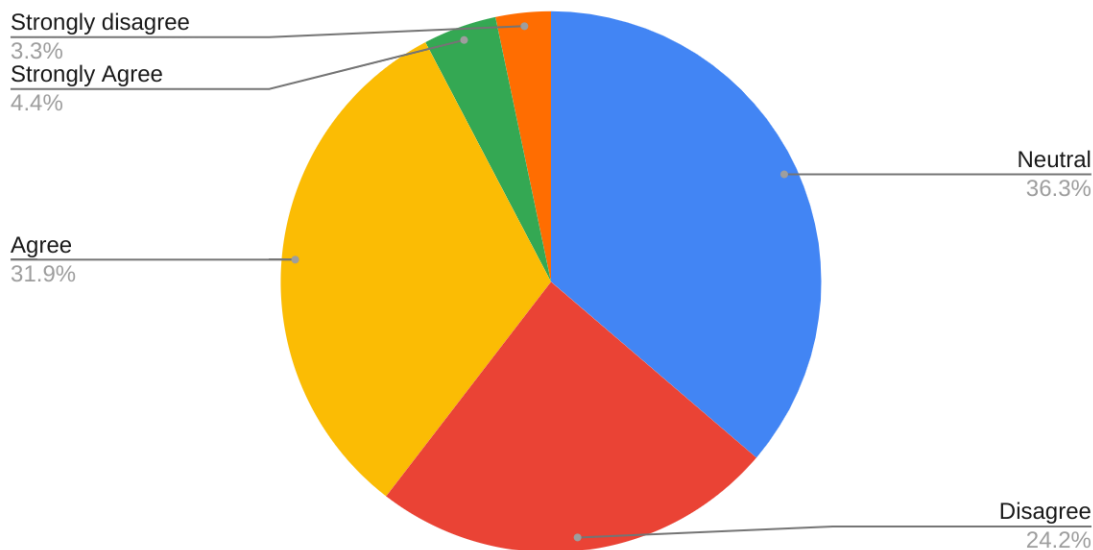
The data shows that 36.3% of participants agree or strongly agree that they provide enough information to the community it represents. The rest either disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral. When prodded further about the "neutral" answers during the interviews, all respondents stated that they always feel they can "do more."

Before asking about their outreach efforts, I needed to understand how the participants felt about cultural differences. I thought their answers might offer information on how their understanding and support of cultural differences influenced their approach to outreach. The question asked if their ECFE program supported and understood the cultural differences that may involve age, gender, and parenting values and styles (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Survey question 21: I Believe Our Program Supports and Adheres to Understanding Different Cultural Expectations, Such As Gender and Age, and Other Parenting Values and Styles.
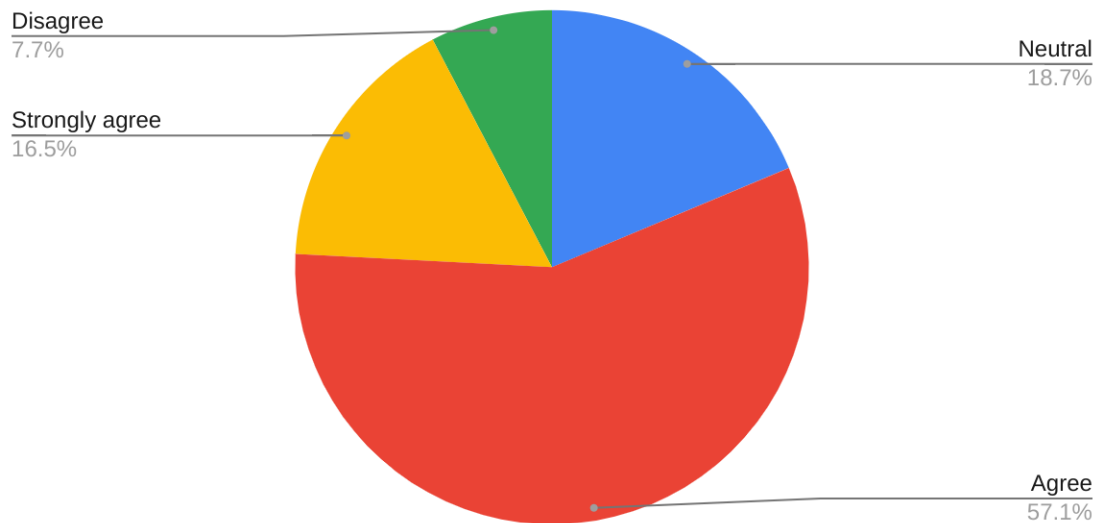
The majority of the participants "agreed" (57.1%) or "strongly agreed" (16.5%) felt their program supported the diverse ways of parenting and adhered to understanding the differences, values, and expectations of each culture, thus being comfortable with promoting ECFE to all communities.

Once I understood the participants' different perspectives and ECFE offerings, the next step was to learn their actual outreach methods. The participants were able to select all that apply to different outreach methods, so the number of selections increased to n=473 (see Table 4).

Table 4

Survey Question 23 (n=473): What Outreach Methods Have You Used?
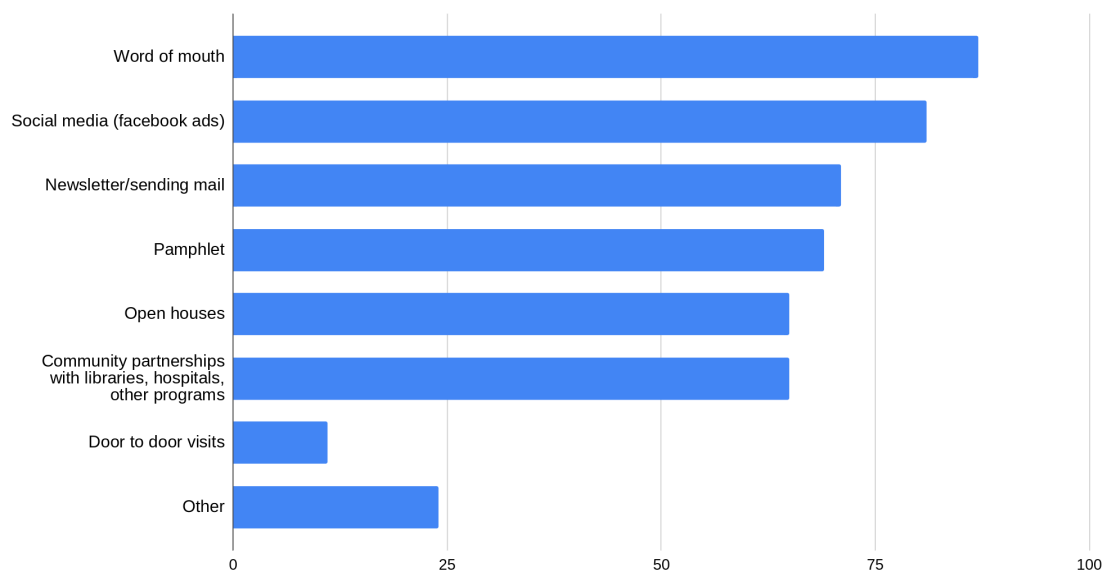
"Word of mouth" was the most popular outreach method. Social media and the use of sending mail and newsletters were the next common outreach methods used. Some of the "other" outreach varied, such as having a mobile ECFE and utilizing district liaisons. One participant shared they have "family special events in coordination with the school where we have class, building relationships with the American Indian Staff in our buildings and sharing information with them, and working on the early childhood census with them." A follow-up question asked whether the participants felt their outreach methods were effective enough (see Figure 14). The answers were evenly distributed.

Figure 14

Survey Question 24: Do You Feel These Methods Were Effective Enough to Reach All Communities in Your District?
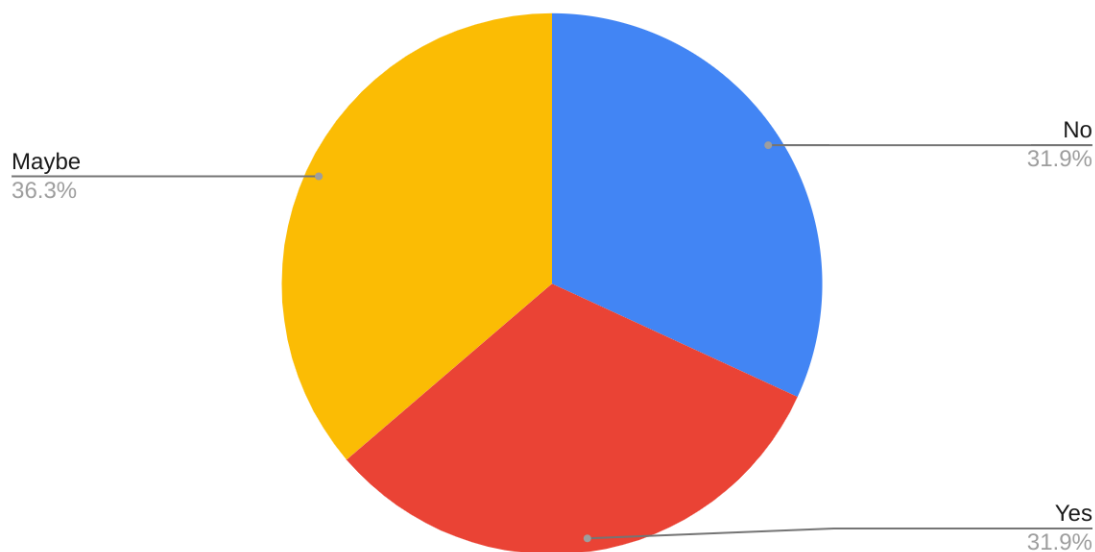
Some of the participants further explained why the answers were split in this survey question during the interviews. For example, I found that the participants' satisfaction level with the effectiveness of their outreach methods was dependent on the resources available and not necessarily the quality of their outreach.

In order to start understanding the participants' willingness to reach many people in their district, survey question 25 asked if participants believed there were other methods to reach the community members (see Figure 15). Many "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that there were other methods.

Figure 15

Survey Question 25: I Believe There are Other Outreach Methods That Our District Can Do to Reach More Community Members.
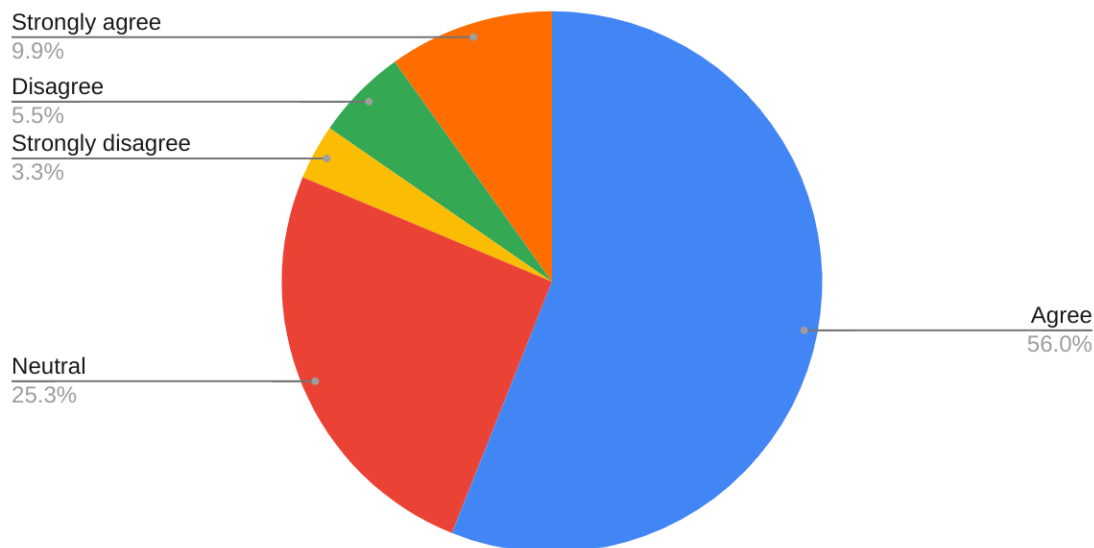
This question supported their interest or awareness of "other" outreach methods they can do to possibly include more BIPOC families.

Collaboration, Including BIPOC Communities

One of the outreach methods recommended by MDE (2011a) was to collaborate with another community program. Collaboration with another program is a benefit to reach communities that ECFE may not be able to reach independently. Before understanding the participants' collaborative strategies with other communities, especially BIPOC communities, survey question 26 asked if their ECFE collaborated with other programs (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Survey Question 26: Our ECFE Collaborates with Other Community Programs.
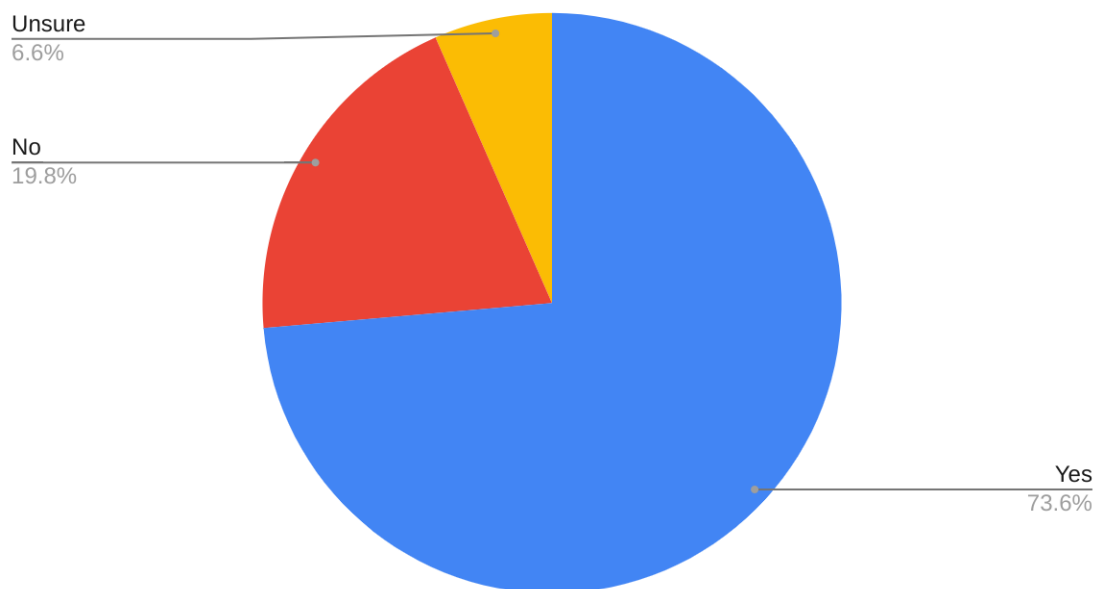
The majority of participants, 73.6%, worked in collaboration with community partners.

The collaborative methods varied. Survey question 27 allowed participants to select all the collaborative methods that applied to their work and write out different methods. The majority of the participants listed "Parent educator consults with the leader from another program," "Parent educator and other program co-teaches a class together," and "Parent educator goes into another program to do group classes" as their collaboration methods (see Table 5).

Table 5

Survey Question 27 (n=135): The Collaborative Methods are (Check All That Apply):
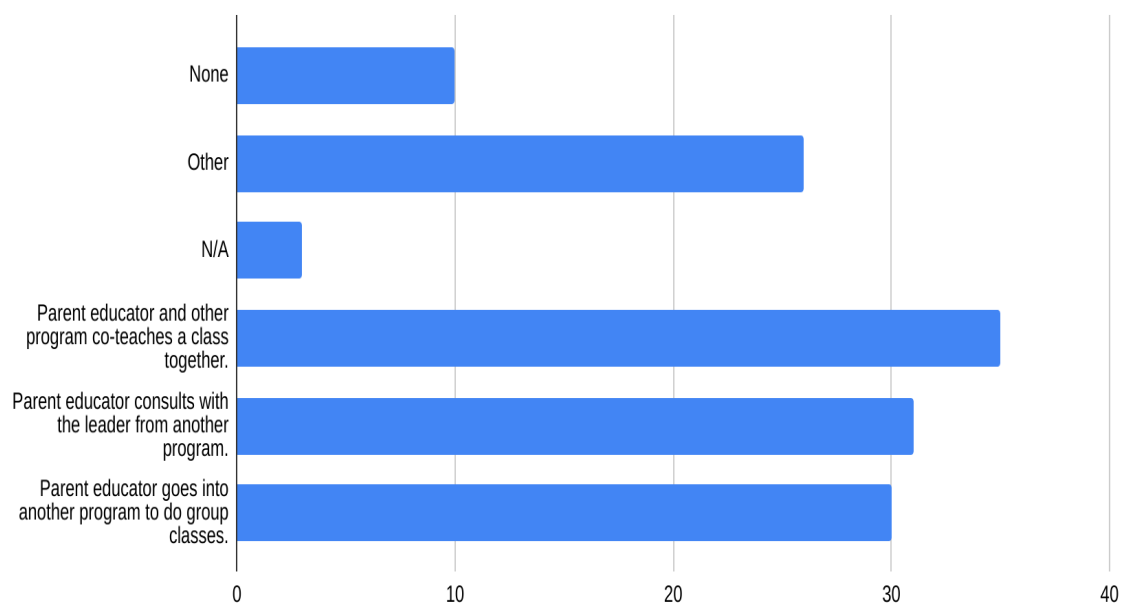
For those that did not collaborate with other programs in survey question 26, they wrote "none" or "n/a" when responding to the methods. One participant further explained that the parent educators in their district have other full-time jobs that they cannot commit to having collaboration work. Those who answered "other" shared a variety of collaborative ways that were not listed, such as working with school counselors, family events with another program, and "offering activities together with other programs."

For those who listed the collaborative methods, the following two survey questions asked how frequently the collaboration occurred (see Table 6) and how long they were (see Figure 17).

Table 6

Survey Question 28: How Often Does the Collaboration Occur?
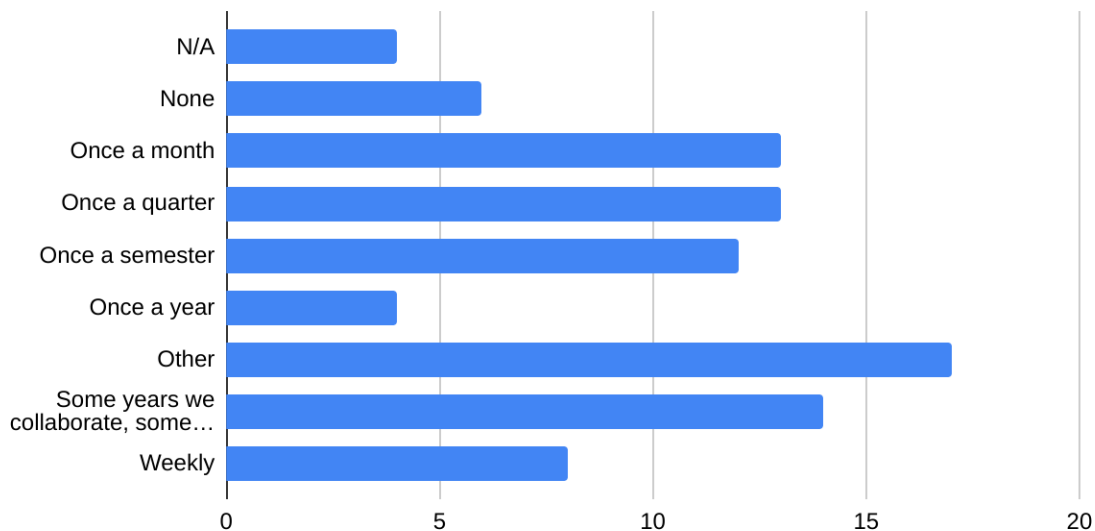
Figure 17

Survey Question 29: How Long Are These Collaborative Classes?
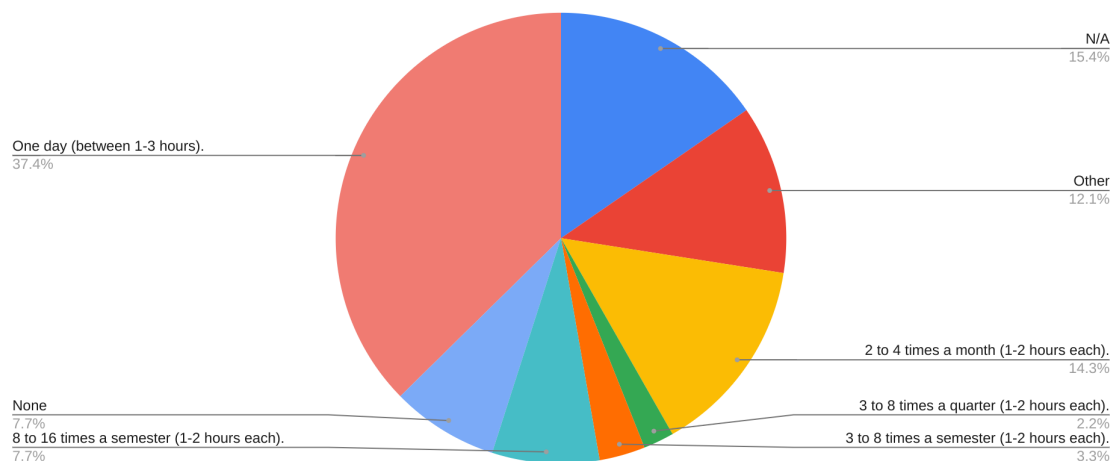
The "other" frequency of collaboration included "ongoing," "biweekly," "two to four times a week," or "working together on an as-needed basis." These questions helped me understand whether the collaboration was a frequent commitment to connect with the community via another program or whether it was a novel or infrequent experience.

Summary of Survey Results

It is clear from the survey results that participants have different ideas and thoughts about outreach and increasing involvement for BIPOC families. The survey results helped me give a glimpse of the participants' thought processes. In many of the "other" comments, they wanted to include more information about what they do or have their experience noticed and recorded. To understand the narrative better and the different perspectives from urban, suburban, and rural regions, it was important to conduct interviews with them.

Interview Results

Out of 91 survey participants (85%), 24 participants (26.4%) consented to have a follow-up interview. While the minimum goal was six interviews, I included nine to gather more information and offer additional perspectives. It was important to include voices from different regions (urban, suburban, and rural) and different areas of those regions. Thus, 24 participants were split into regions according to the zip codes they provided, mapped where they were located, and then contacted on a first-come, first-served basis according to the region with a set date and time. Unfortunately, some participants selected "yes" to an interview but failed to provide contact information. Additionally, a new interview participant was contacted if the selected interviewee did not respond within a week of contact. The majority of the interview participants were White, and only one identified themselves as BIPOC. Interviews were conducted between March 8, 2023, and April 13, 2023, through Google Meet. Participants were provided with the interview questions (see Appendix B) through email before our meeting to review the questions and to provide a reminder for the scheduled interview.

The interviews were recorded with participant permission through the Google Meet recording tool and transcribed through Otter ai. transcription tool. Although the interviews were structured with a set of questions, in at least half of the interviews, I included additional questions that were not planned, which Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested could happen (p. 19). To keep momentum and to remember the interview as accurately as possible through the recording and the transcribing, the coding process happened within one week of the interview.

The follow-up interviews were conducted to learn how participants are working to decrease barriers and understand what they are currently doing for their outreach methods. Similar questions to the survey were posed in the interview to offer opportunities for the participants to expand on the answers stated in the survey.

The deductive coding process provided the following predetermined themes: Relationship/Connection (with a subtheme of collaboration and partnerships) and budget. Other themes emerged through an inductive coding process, such as support, staff, and the COVID-19/pandemic. The results of the interviews will be reported based on themes that came through the interviews. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, they were identified by their first initial region (U for urban, S for suburban, R for rural) and number: U1, U2, U3, S1, S2, S3, and R1, R2, R3 (see Table 7).

Table 7

Description of Study Participants

Participant	Region	Years in ECFE	Role
U1	Urban	10-15 years	Early Childhood Family Services Manager
U2	Urban	10-15 years	Enrollment and Outreach Coordinator
U3	Urban	20+ years	ECFE Supervisor
S1	Suburban	20+ years	Early Learning Coordinator
S2	Suburban	10-15 years	Early Childhood Coordinator
S3	Suburban	5-10 years	Director
R1	Rural	5-10 years	Parent Educator
R2	Rural	15-20 years	Parent educator, Early Childhood Coordinator
R3	Rural	5-10 years	Enrollment Coordinator, Outreach Coordinator, Classroom Teacher, Early Childhood Coordinator

Relationships/Connection

To increase BIPOC families to join ECFE traditional group classes that are not considered affinity groups, I knew building relationships and connections with the participants was key. Thus, this predetermined theme was coded in each of the participants' interviews. As predicted, throughout the interview, all the participants reflected on the importance of building community relationships; they emphasized that each parent was the backbone of the families' participation.

Each participant's goal was to find the appropriate method that worked to build connections and relationships. For example, R1 highlighted that having an affinity group

to create a space for the BIPOC community allowed opportunities for the families to branch out into the other ECFE group classes. All participants except R1 discussed the importance of finding the liaison/s or point person that connects ECFE to the BIPOC members. That "liaison" may be a BIPOC staff, someone who represents the community of the target audience they are trying to reach, or someone whose work is to learn about what the BIPOC community wants and tailor the program to the needs of that community. R2 shared,

> It made me think of the importance of appreciating the one person that she is and how valuable she is, but also not relying on one person but also setting some systems in place so that we can continue to be able to support all of our families.

> S2 explained, "Getting ourselves out into the community and being known as a safe place has probably been the most beneficial outreach effort that we have done. And that takes time." R3 stated that to connect with Spanish-speaking families and make the environment welcoming, a BIPOC staff member who spoke Spanish helped give insight, "She kind of informed me of some other cultures and values and what to look for and how to reach out." U1 and U2 participants took the relationship further and joined the community Facebook (ECFE and non-ECFE) group to connect with families by making positive comments or continuing a thread another parent started.

Collaboration/Partnerships. Collaboration and creating partnerships are other forms of relationship-building and connection. All urban regions, S2 and S3, shared that their site collaborates and has partnerships with many different organizations, and some may offer meals and transportation for the families. The collaboration and target communities differ according to the district. All the rural regions shared that ECFE

collaboration helps them connect to the communities that may be difficult to reach out to because of the location of the ECFE site or staffing issues. For example, R2 responded, "We have a really unique connection network with our local [community]. So we have a [place] in one of our towns that has done phenomenal work, reaching out to our Latino community." S1 shared that they had many collaborations in the past; however, staffing changes in both ECFE and collaborative sites caused disruptions that have been difficult to rebuild.

Two urban and all three suburban participants shared insight that the success of collaboration depends on the staff doing the work and time. If the fit, effort, and relationship are not built, it may not continue or be as successful. For example, U2 stated, "Anytime there's a change, because it's so relationship-based, you may build a really good relationship with somebody, and then if they leave, you don't know what's gonna happen there." S1 shared that there were many collaborations in the past, but presently, it is lacking.

Budget

Although relationships are valued to reach BIPOC families, due to budget cuts that were implemented by Governor Pawlenty in 2003 (MDE, 2011b; Minneck, 2003), I predicted that budget would be one of the predetermined themes that participants were going to discuss as one of the struggles for outreach and doing work to involve more BIPOC families.

The allocation of budgets was critical, especially in the rural regions. R2 revealed that their budget is "quite small. . .but yeah, of course, if you had more money and more staff available, you could do lots more." R1 shared, "Transportation for those families in

our areas is a really big challenge. A lot of families want to come to ECFE or want to be a part of programming, but they just don't have the means. And we can't provide that at this point." R3 discussed further issues with budgeting in their district: "ECFE does not get a lot of funding from the state, so we don't have a lot of money to spend on mailings, which probably would be the most efficient to make sure everyone is getting information." R3 also revealed that they write grants to receive more funding for their community. They continue,

> …so our school is located in [point A]. But then there's some charter schools, and the district itself is very wide, so [point B] is about 20 minutes west. And so I wrote a grant this year to expand, and we've been holding classes down that way.

Because their rural district is wide and covers a whole range of areas, they also wrote a grant to have all the ECFE classes be free and provide a free meal so families feel welcome and build on the community. R3 further explained the challenges of budget and funding allocation in rural areas. They serve a wide physical range with a small number of students: "You're supposed to get funding for the zero to four census. But because we're under 150 students in that census, we just get like one flat rate, and it's really not very much. So I think the way they do funding and the appropriate funds needs to be looked at at some point in time." R3 raises the issue of how the budget may not reflect their needs in supporting the families they serve since the distance is too big to reach them.

The budgeting for each district affects the way participants address the outreach methods and barriers to increase BIPOC participation. As R3 mentioned, budgeting allocation seems to depend on the location and census. U3 shared that they had the funds

to do different forms of outreach, partnerships, and professional development. U2 shared that they have funds to provide transportation for those who live in their urban region. However, U1 discussed the challenges of budgeting in their urban region. Due to their location, although they are considered an urban region, they do not have the staff to support their needs to cover the demands they might have in the urban area. For example, they do not have the budget to hire another staff member for marketing, learning about their community, and understanding and changing the shortcomings their area might have.

There were other budgeting issues. S1 and S3 discussed budgeting in the form of hiring and retaining staff. For example, S3 stated they have some budget for full-time positions to continue the liaison work and other classes, but "they are funded through some grant funding as well that we continue to go out for. And so it would be challenging to continue that without some of that [funding] support."

Because of the budget cuts that have continued since 2003, participants voiced concerns about the state-wide support. Many expressed hope for at least two full-time support in the Early Childhood Division and ECFE to happen again in MDE. U2 explained, "The tricky part is we don't have a whole lot of manpower at the state assigned to just ECFE, so I think that's just always been an area of improvement for ECFE in general." In response to the question, "How to address the barriers and increase participant participation for BIPOC families in traditional group classes?" U3 answered, "I really think these two positions at MDE will help because then that'll give us a state presence." With the new legislative team in Minnesota, there is hope for an increase in budgets, so these issues may not continue in the near future.

Support

   "Support" developed as a theme in two ways. Respondents discussed how ECFE could provide a support system for the families and stated their vision for receiving more support as a profession from the state. It was necessary to distinguish between the two "supports" as I coded the interviews.

   Support For Families. ECFE is a place to provide support for families. It is clear from the participants that their definition of support was not to "teach parents how to parent." How the support is provided depends on the community needs assessment in each district. Generally, the space is created for the families to support one another. U3 said it is a helpful space "when you have other parents that you can go to for support." U2 added, "I know how much value there is in parents connecting with other parents that kids the same age are going, they're able to build up that support for each other…ECFE, we could provide a space for these families to come together to meet to talk to connect, to build up a community of support." Because ECFE is only provided in Minnesota, once a family moves out of the state, they may not have similar services in other states. U1 said they have "requests we get from families who move out of state to a state that doesn't have any ECFE programming for support."

   All the regions, in particularly suburban regions and U1, discussed the importance of providing support for families where it is needed, whether it is through providing the exact time and space that works for the families in that community, finding and providing BIPOC parent educators that help families feel safe with someone who looks like them, or providing the necessary supports, like an interpreter, that helps families feel like their voices are heard. However, R2 shared the difficulty in using the interpreters and

providing support in an inclusive way, "Working with interpreters is a learned skill set. And so learning how to pace your programming so that you are being inclusive to all is a challenge in the beginning and takes time and patience to grow." S3 also felt that providing support beyond the physical location of ECFE was important, "I feel like sometimes we're always expecting people to come to us. And how can we go to them?" By providing opportunities to "go to them," it is necessary to address the budgeting allocation stated earlier.

Rural regions discussed providing support for families in practical means and how it is important to understand through the community needs assessment, such as transportation, the times the classes are offered, and if it includes meals. For example, R3 stated, "Having a class in the evening, the dinner time was too much of a rush, too much pressure. So by taking off having to make dinner, feed them and clean up from dinner… we provided the meal." R1 shared their program called "SOS - Support on Site" which provides information about ECFE to companies within the community. They collaborated with another program that offered space to provide an event for those who may not be able to join because of location and time.

All the participants believed that ECFE is there to provide a safe space for support for families rather than "teaching how to parent" as a means of support.

Support from the State. Four out of nine respondents made a point to share their thoughts about support and accessibility requirements from the state. When the last question was asked: "Is there anything else you want to share that will support future efforts and continue to address the barriers and increase participant participation for BIPOC families in traditional group classes?" U3 answered,

I think these two positions at MDE will help because that'll give us a state presence. Okay. And I think that if we can get all of our superintendents, all of our principals, and our internal structure and base understanding that we are a part of this lifecycle, it's going to change. It's going to change. We just have to get all of the education on board.

S1 also shared about making the profession more accessible for those interested in getting the license. S3 added that it is important to find how to attain the parent education license be more accessible:

The more that we can make it doable and approachable and affordable and do it while you're already are working and those kinds of things. I think it's gonna help because, like I was saying earlier, we have 56% of students from diverse backgrounds, but our staff don't match that. And so, that, to me, is a big, big thing that I would love to continue to see efforts around.

The statewide presence and support for educators and future educators in the early childhood and family education field is imminent. More about diverse staffing will be addressed below.

Staff

While coding relationships/connections, I noticed "staff" as a recurring theme for all the respondents. The staff includes educators, liaisons, translators, and all ECFE support staff that help make ECFE feel welcome. It is no surprise since building relationships/connections involves human connections. It is important to have a supportive staff that understands the work and is willing to fulfill the vision of outreach and inclusivity.

Most participants shared it was important to have or hire staff members or educators for BIPOC families that looked like them. U2 discussed how having an educator or support staff that looks like the families/attendants and understands the values has made a positive difference for BIPOC families in their area. A few respondents further discussed having more access to certification or licensing, as stated above, which opens doors for more diverse educators. Many obstacles, such as paying tuition for the student teaching experience, may not provide the necessary means to pursue this job. Those who can pursue these opportunities are those who can afford to take classes, do student teaching, and have the time to accomplish them. S1 reiterated that part of the issue is that it takes too long to get the license to be a parent educator and not enough living wage and hours provided to work, which also means it limits the staff opportunities and potential BIPOC for parent educators. There is a correlation which Love (2020) stated that 88% of all teachers in the U.S. are White (p. 131).

Another few participants discussed how staff, especially those working as family educators, have different variations of cultural competency. Their values and ability to understand and build trust may not match well with the BIPOC families. This was a critical piece that urban and suburban respondents were struggling to find a balance. U3 shared, "I do my very best to reach out and hire staff of color. I have quite a few EAS and TAs. But teachers, it is really hard to find teachers. . . I'd like more diversity on staff. I feel that's critically important and another piece with the values and differences." U1 discussed the importance of matching the right staff and educator to a class that may have strengths in specific areas that would be helpful for the group. In general, having professional development that helps all educators have cultural competency and

knowledge about differences in values, systems, and culture was important for most respondents.

Unfortunately, the rural regions' biggest issue was generally needing more staff to have time or budget to execute the outreach ideas for families. R3 mentioned that they did not have a community director dedicated to problem-solving some of these outreach issues and providing support for all families in their district before the pandemic, so their ECFE classes were limited to what the parent educators could do on their own. R1 shared that they have only one parent educator, one early childhood teacher for ECFE, and one paraprofessional, and "We're balancing all of that, but making sure we're meeting the needs of everybody is a little challenging." Their range of district coverage may be large, but they may only have one central area to meet and not have the right amount of staff to cover the distance and support the families living in the district outskirts.

COVID-19/Pandemic

It was about three years after the coronavirus 2019 pandemic (COVID-19) began when I started my data collection. I was unsure whether respondents would discuss the effects of COVID-19 in our interviews. Almost all the respondents discussed how the pandemic affected their actions at the time, resulting in low attendance or shutdown of classes and collaborations. Many continue to be short-staffed since then. However, only a few participants discussed the pandemic's effects in relation to BIPOC participation today. U3 shared that they had to rebuild their collaborative partnerships again after the pandemic, which took time. S3 shared how their idea for "parent ed for one" became very popular through virtual learning:

…you have parent ed for one, and that has been a positive for some families that are not necessarily comfortable coming to a traditional class. And we have seen that need rise over the COVID time. And so that has been something we've been happy to see with all families of backgrounds. And then that we've been really trying to think about when are class offerings. You're always thinking about that, but having some Saturdays and some evenings and nature events and some pop-ups and trying to just really appeal to different different groups and different families.

This format of individualized parent education continues and is very much tailored to the families' needs (i.e., virtual, home visits, in-person elsewhere). R3 adapted their classes according to the needs of BIPOC participants, who were still slightly hesitant to participate as COVID-19 restrictions loosened up. A few of the participants started their role in doing outreach amid the pandemic, so they are still learning the process and finding ways to be inclusive for all community members within the budget provided. This includes reconnecting with past organizations and beginning new relationships. Understanding the past process and trying to organize new ways as the world phased out of the pandemic has been a learning process for some participants.

There was a positive learning aspect that came out of the pandemic. Although not specific to BIPOC participation, U2 shared how the pandemic resulted in navigating and understanding virtual learning. COVID-19 was a disruption in the education world. At various levels, the participants continue to work within their current resources and capacity to include BIPOC families in their ECFE districts.

Summary

The survey data helped me understand participants' experiences and how and what they were doing regarding outreach and support structures to include more BIPOC families. Some questions gave me clearer data about their experiences in outreach. However, the interview process honed in on the personal and specific issues that may occur in each region, which also brought out specific themes. The interview process gave me the details I needed to understand the differences in specific regions, with the mixture of personal experiences, abilities, and thoughts in the whole process of working to include more BIPOC families in their district.

Chapter five will be the culminating chapter of this research. It will include reflection on the major learnings and their relation to the literature review. It will also address the future implications of the study, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The chapter will conclude with my future hope for using and communicating the results.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

This research started from my personal experience as a Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) parent participating in ECFE classes. This sparked a motivation to expand the concept of public parent education, which has the potential to benefit and support all parents. In order to proceed, it was necessary first to address and learn about the program in Minnesota. This study aimed to understand the current methodologies of parent education outreach and collaboration with other programs, particularly BIPOC communities. The findings matched my initial assumptions. However, I was surprised by the complexities that smaller urban, some suburban, and town/rural areas have with budgeting and outreach. The research also examined the efforts to increase BIPOC participation in traditional ECFE parent education group classes in Minnesota. The study also investigated the types of support ECFE educators and coordinators needed to reach the BIPOC communities.

This chapter addresses the major learnings from the research question: *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?* And secondary questions: *What are the current outreach methodologies that ECFE staff in Minnesota utilize to engage with families in their own communities? What is their collaborative process with other community partnerships?* In addressing these learnings, I highlight the benefits of my qualitative research methods, the survey and interview, for understanding the ECFE work and respondents' experiences. Later, the limitations of the

study, revisiting of the literature, as well as future implications of the study, and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Reflection and Major Learnings

There were two purposes for using a qualitative survey and an interview. First, the survey provided a broad spectrum of participants' experiences in Minnesota with factual records. Second, the interview provided detailed information on each participant's experience in ECFE. The interview process also allowed further data collection around budgeting issues and the differences in regional district struggles.

During the survey process, I was confident of receiving a minimum of 75 responses, and in total, I received 91 responses; however, I was hoping it would be more to get a larger sample. The survey respondents were overwhelmingly from rural/town regions. It would have been ideal to receive a larger spectrum of responses from different urban and suburban regions of Minnesota as well. Nevertheless, there were enough responses from participants to represent each region during the interview. To address the first research question, *How do ECFE programs and educators currently address the barriers to participation and work to increase participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?* Three key connections developed through deducing and analyzing the survey and interview results: trust, staff, and support systems. "Trust" and "staff" are actions that can be localized and addressed in each district to understand the barriers. However, having a stable and consistent "support system" within the ECFE community and public early education field is necessary to make ECFE in Minnesota truly successful and barrier-free. The following information offers reflection and elaboration on these findings.

Trust

Throughout the interview process, it was clear that the participants understood that to have a successful ECFE experience, they must build relationships and connections. Two urban participants discussed how relationship building is also trust building. Edmondson (2003) defined trust as "the expectation that others' future actions will be favorable to one's interests" (p. 1). Edmondson (2003) further described that having trust could provide a "psychological safety," which secures the "individuals' perceptions about the consequences of interpersonal risks" people take in an organizational environment, such as asking questions and getting feedback (p. 4). All the participants described the importance of building relationships and connections; thus, it is also necessary to gain trust to have a successful ECFE class with a group of families that come together for parental support.

All interview participants emphasized providing individualized or specific community support in ECFE classes, to which two urban participants further stated that building relationships leads to building trust. This ranged from having adequate staff and liaisons to make connections with families to doing community investigations and needs assessments to understand the localized needs. ECFE spaces are accessed only in specific locations; thus, sometimes, the educator must branch out of the site to provide group classes. R2 discussed their connection network that brings in the Latino community from her rural region. S3 shared their experience of having "parent ed for one" for those not ready to participate in traditional classes. In their experience, post-COVID-19, this was one way of building trust with one family at a time in hopes that they would come to a group class and eventually spread the positive "word of mouth." According to the survey,

in connecting with BIPOC families and all families in general, "word of mouth" was considered the leading effective model of reaching out to the BIPOC community and all community members, according to survey question 23 (see Table 4 on p. 84). "Word of Mouth" seems to be a common outreach methodology for ECFE and other organizations. Nguyen et al. (2019) emphasized how relationships provide personal connection and "positive word of mouth," which then leads to gaining new relationships and further explained that "positive word of mouth is highly reliable because when customers are impressed, satisfied with products and services, they will introduce their relatives and friends to use them without any benefit or very little" (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 67). As discussed previously, because trust is being formed between the families and ECFE staff while building on their relationships, relying on the families' word of mouth is essential to generate new families to attend ECFE. Once one person trusts the staff/ECFE group/parent educator, that person helps to bridge the other community members to join since that person trusts the program. It goes back to how human interactions are essential, and part of the relationship-building process with new members was halted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trust is essential when creating collaborative work with other organizations and communities. ECFE staff are expected to build trust with other community leaders or organizations. Different ECFE locations are constantly working to rebuild that connection. S1 mentioned the struggles of turnover; if the liaison or other trusted individual quits or leaves the position on both ends, the relationships must be built over again. S1 further described that starting a new relationship with a new staff is not always easy since it involves humanity, personality compatibility, and empathy. As an outsider

learning about these organizations, including ECFE, a collaborative process between publicly funded and nonprofit programs could build trust and thus help to advocate for better services and practices for BIPOC families. Trust takes time, but it is important to provide individualized and community trust in ECFE in order for more BIPOC families to attend traditional group classes to meet, sympathize, and empathize with other families that are experiencing the same parenting concerns and worries.

Staff

To address the barriers to participation in ECFE amongst BIPOC families, it is necessary to construct an environment with staff who are aware of and understand the BIPOC experiences and with staff who look like the families. The ECFE field is based on relationship, connection, and trust. Thus, it is important to have an effective staff working in ECFE. In survey question 14 (see Table 2 on p. 75), many participants felt the lack of BIPOC teacher representation is one of the major barriers that bring in BIPOC families. During the interviews, U2 and U3 shared that having staff who look like the families and understand their values has a positive effect on BIPOC families in their area. Other interview participants shared that sometimes, the BIPOC staff unrelated to ECFE were the ones who became the liaison and connected the BIPOC families to ECFE through the means of word-of-mouth. Connecting with staff who reflect their families could be the gateway for more BIPOC to attend traditional group ECFE classes because of shared understanding of experiences and possible values. Being in the field for a long time, U3 reflected on the types of support families needed throughout the years, the necessary staff, and the experience they had in building relationships and trust with families. U3 further shared their experience teaching a diverse group of single parents who came

together in an ECFE class 23 years ago. In sharing this experience, U3 acknowledged that ECFE's supporting role and space offered "a relationship they were looking for. They were looking for the belonging." Most participants in this research have been committed to ECFE for a long time.

While the data demonstrated that it is important to increase representation in ECFE staffing, not every region has the budget to hire the staff or a BIPOC person who wants to apply for a teaching position. A few discussed the struggle to hire the necessary licensed staff that meets the needs of the community and are committed to learning about the people they are serving or retaining the staff they have. U3 shared that struggle. Rural regions also shared that more staff are needed to do different types of outreach. Participant R1 shared that sometimes, the one BIPOC contact may leave due to other commitments or life circumstances.

When hiring is difficult, it is important to have staff aware of the differences in culture and values of BIPOC families. Survey question 21 (see Figure 13 on p. 83) demonstrated that most study participants felt their program supported the diverse ways of parenting and adhered to understanding the differences, values, and expectations of each culture. However, not all participants felt this was the case during the interview. S2, in particular, suggested more is needed than respecting diverse parenting values. They emphasized the importance of every staff taking professional development sessions on cultural competency. The cultural competency work may lead to being reflective of themselves and their approach to others and being open to learning new ways of supporting and working with people different from their norms and values. Love (2020) stated that if teacher educators, those who educate and support the new group of

educators and staff, expect the staff to be "culturally relevant and culturally

competent…then teachers [they] should be required to study culture" (p. 128). This aligns

with Bierman et al. (2017) and Teti et al. (2017), who reported that parent education

should be more culturally responsive and provide "culturally relevant programs" that

help staff learn to provide support for the communities they serve (Teti et al., 2017, p.

20). U3 expressed how they provide professional development and support for the staff to

understand each other:

> I will bring different people in from the district in different departments
>
> and use my staff to put on professional development events, and to get us
>
> talking, to get us reflecting, to get us to look at the commonalities and
>
> values that we have. [I work] with the staff to realize all families want the
>
> best for their children, right? We don't want to separate families out, let's
>
> find commonalities.

Whether it is to hire more BIPOC parent educators and staff or to retain the

existing staff depending on the budget, all ECFE staff and educators would benefit from

examining and discussing cultures and values that are different from their own.

ECFE as a Support System for Families

ECFE was developed with the underlying purpose of providing support for all the

families in Minnesota (MNAFEE, n.d.). As a smaller public organization, ECFE requires

more support from the state. The types of support may vary between programs and

districts. For example, some local districts may need varied assistance with budgeting for

providing free events, traveling, or food. However, a bigger state presence and an

understanding of family education and its value are necessary to impact the whole ECFE

organization positively. To this day, not many people understand or know about ECFE, as it was addressed in the first chapter. As a doctoral candidate in a class cohort mixed with directors, program specialists, principals, and teachers, only a handful of people knew about ECFE out of nearly twenty classmates.

The importance of early childhood education is beginning to gain recognition in the United States, but it is not coming quickly enough. While the Minnesota ECFE program has been around for nearly 50 years, it still struggles to find its place in the education system. For example, U3 and U2 shared their thoughts on the gains, such as the positive recognition ECFE would have by restoring two full-time positions who oversee Early Childhood programs in MDE. U3 stated that it would be helpful to have superintendents and principals who recognize the importance of ECFE and early childhood as part of the "lifecycle." As the participants shared their thoughts, it was clear they had high hopes for changes, recognition, and support in the Early Childhood division in the state.

Many participants shared their concerns with the support system involving budget and time. These problems were evident in survey question 17 (see Figure 10 on p. 77). The question asked whether the participants' ECFE program provided times conducive to all community members, and 61.6% of the group answered "Neutral," "disagree," or "strongly disagree." The "Neutral" answers added that there was a lack of staff, space, budget, and time, followed with, "We try our best." Depending on the location and region of the ECFE site, it seems the given budget created a barrier to one or more of these issues. Often, the participants relied on additional support from grants to fund their program and make ECFE even more accessible for their community as R3 does for their

program. This required the staff to take the time to write the grants. Survey question 14 (see Table 2 on p. 75) showed "transportation" as one of the highest barriers. Survey question 20 also stated a similar concern for transportation (see Figure 11 on p. 78). This requires more budgeting for transportation, especially in the rural areas that receive their allocated budget according to the census of population, not the district line that may include the wide range of areas they serve. Through the data, it is clear that the participants feel the budget be reevaluated.

ECFE public program has major benefits in supporting families and children in Minnesota. However, each program has been left to find a solution to address outreach and increase BIPOC participation and collaboration. To address the barriers and continue the efforts in increasing BIPOC participation, these three major learnings of trust, such as building trust and relationships; staff, such as retaining and hiring staff with the same vision; and support systems, which requires collaborative efforts with the MN government, have to be continually reviewed. Currently, with the new legislative power in 2023, the bill to have two full-time leaders overseeing ECFE and support for professional development in the MDE was approved (MNAFEE, 2023; Early Childhood Family Education Support Staff Act, 2023) and will be in effect in 2024. We are potentially beginning a turning point with these new positions in place. Many interviewees hoped redistribution and reconfiguration would alleviate some barriers. Outreach methods should be reevaluated in accordance with the budgets.

Review of Literature

When interviewing all nine participants, it was noted that they all spoke about creating a trusting relationship with the families where there were no "one size does not

fit all" strategies to seek participants and learn about the families and demographics they presently serve (Chase & Valorose, 2019, p. 1). The participants incorporated creative ways and ideas to connect with the communities, which will later be introduced.

As stated in 1989 by Dr. Ruth E. Randall, the commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Education, "Early Childhood Family Education is considered one of the major innovations in public education in this country" (as cited in Kristensen et al., 1989, Preface). Each interview respondent understood the importance of parent education services as the "support of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth of their children" (MNAFEE, n.d., p. 2). Through this research, I found that ECFE is considered "one of the major innovations in public education" (as cited in Kristensen et al., 1989, Preface) because the intended goal is to support, connect, and build positive relationships for all parents to feel successful in raising their children. Earlier in 2001, Keller (2001) stated that tight budgets, lack of time, and the roles and hats the program coordinators and educators wear were key issues that created barriers for ECFE programs to retain or involve BIPOC and low-income families. The research affirmed that these issues continue to affect ECFE staff and provide some barriers to increasing BIPOC families in traditional ECFE classes.

The changes in leadership and budget cuts back in 1992 (MDE, 2011b) have everlasting effects on how ECFE deals with staffing, professional development, transportation, and recognition today. The allocation of budgeting differed depending on the district and the census results, and it was clear that the rural regions struggled to provide transportation and times conducive to the non-standard work schedules, which

were one of the stated barriers in the literature (Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota, 2017).

Cooke (2006) stated that Minnesota is the only state to require a parent education license to work in ECFE programs (p. 795). While it is vital to have licensure and credentials to be a professional parent educator, this requirement also causes barriers to staffing. Requiring a parent educator license or a teaching license in Minnesota means having unpaid student teaching experience is also necessary. This barrier, with the time and the financial expense of obtaining the licensure, may deter some potential staff from becoming qualified parent educators in ECFE. In the literature review, Miller (1994) advised that "licensure alone does not guarantee that outcomes relating to group process skills and abilities will naturally occur" (pp. 42-43). S1 discussed the reimagination of the licensure process because it takes too long to become a licensed parent educator, and not enough living wage and hours are provided to work.

Implications

There is a necessity to look into budgeting, access to ECFE and teaching, collaboration, and ECFE recognition in Minnesota. Three interviewees mentioned the importance of having full-time early childhood leaders working at MDE. A lot was accomplished when they were present up until the early 1990s. For example, they provided "state-wide regional in-services twice per year for the professional development in 12 sites on many topic topics including, outreach." (Betty Cooke, personal communication, 2023). With statewide leadership, the hope is to bring more awareness about the public education program's availability amongst Minnesota leaders and policymakers, understand early childhood development and the necessary support

families need, and provide more recognition and information about ECFE to families in all the districts.

Although budgeting is a difficult task in any department, the research suggests there be a reassessment of allocation into outreach within ECFE. Smaller urban cities, suburban areas, and rural areas mentioned their struggles in reaching out to all the families in their districts because of budgeting issues; sometimes, extra budget was desired for transportation and sending physical mail. It would be beneficial with more monetary support for districts to cover all the boundaries they are assigned to cover. Although there are new ways to reach families through technology, not all families can access them.

Gaining access to become a licensed educator is a general issue in the nation, including Minnesota. For many, the wages are not compensated for the work and the time put in to become a licensed educator, including student teaching experience. While it is important to have student teaching to understand and learn the how-tos of teaching, there must be a way to be compensated or aid for putting in time used for a paid job. According to a few participants, there are only a few full-time parent educator positions to make the career sustainable. With this stipulation, because there is already a lack of BIPOC teachers in the nation, having a full-time BIPOC parent educator would also be challenging. Different pathways, support, or access to becoming a licensed educator should be considered.

There have been a few mentions of cultural competency work amongst staff when supporting BIPOC families in ECFE. Therefore, the parent educators and teacher

education programs were recommended to reevaluate and understand the stance and privilege they may have. Love (2020) emphasized that

> Teacher education programs ask students to speak openly and honestly about race and racism without the students having any understanding about where they stand in relation to systems of privilege and oppression and how these systems function in their everyday lives. (p. 130)

Programs and institutions like ECFE must create opportunities for all educators to be aware of their privilege and oppression before working with students and families.

While some districts collaborate with other programs (73.6%), such as the library, Head Start, and women's shelter, according to the survey and interview, other districts do not (19.8%) (see Figure 16, p. 87). Sometimes, this is due to staffing issues, such as finding the appropriate staff that can work with others; or other times, they do not have enough people or time to find collaboration work with other programs. For those who can collaborate with other community groups, relationships develop. For example, R3 stated, "I send them [tribal council] information because they are the ones that would disperse it. And then they also will work with the community center director, specifically, because [they] just has a lot of different ways to communicate and connect with families as well." R3 further explained that ECFE events are held in the same space where the Native community meets. In addition, S1 shared that when they were first hired in the 1990s, they did much collaborative work with federal and county agencies. Another example involved U1's experience having a "partnership with state counties or county where we have a social worker who works with Somali and Arabic speaking families." The partnership was a collaborative parent education session that involved mothers and

children attending class once a month. U1 also provided another example of the collaborative parent education classes they do with a program that supports families who are experiencing homelessness. Even though staffing, time, and budget may be an issue, when possible, collaboration with other programs would provide more BIPOC participation in learning about and experiencing ECFE classes.

There should be an emphasis on collaboration with other programs, especially if the ECFE location is unsuitable for some families, and combine resources for family support; increased funding for collaboration would provide more support for families who do not have access to ECFE. As part of the work for cultural competency and community building in different parts of the district, Love (2020) suggested educators "working with community groups in solidarity to address issues impacting their students and their students' communities" (p. 11). By working with different BIPOC communities, the collaboration will strengthen the relationships and trust in attending ECFE.

Potential Future Changes and Barriers Being Addressed

In the midst of this research in 2023, with MN legislative leadership changing, some of these barriers started to be considered for change. Many early childhood workers, MNAFEE leaders, and lobbyists advocated for two early childhood leaders to be more present in MDE; this bill was passed and will be enacted in 2024 (Early Childhood Family Education Support Staff Act, 2023). Additionally, the University of Minnesota Department of Family Social Science's Family and Parent education program collaborated with MNAFEE to advocate at the capital and successfully received "$2.5 million annually for Early Childhood and Parent Education Grow-Your-Own grants" (McCully & Jost, 2023; Parent and Family Education Alumni Newsletter, personal

communication, Summer 2023; Grants for Grow Your Own Early Childhood and Family Educator Programs, 2023). Grant recipients can use the stipend for expenses, such as for student teaching or tuition.

To address the cultural competency work in the field, "the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) adopted new Standards of Effective Practice in 2023 – relying on years of stakeholder input, as well as research on the science of learning and development" (MN PELSB, 2023, p. 2). "Racial consciousness and reflection" are part of the standards that need to be met to complete the initial teaching licensure in Minnesota (MN PELSB, 2023). With additional leadership in the Minnesota Department of Education, there is hope that some of these implications will be addressed.

Limitations

Although the questions in the survey were piloted and reviewed before the distribution, some participants interpreted a few questions differently than intended. There was also space for participants to include their answers, which created opportunities for them to write in a response. The original intention was to provide a choice that was sometimes helpful to see the different opinions and experiences. However, it was occasionally confusing as their written answer was the same as the likened scale provided. Thankfully, the majority's answer helped create a distinguishable result. The results of "other" were made for some of the differentiation. For this reason, there is a possibility that respondents may not have read thoroughly or understood the intended question.

Another limitation may involve potential selection bias, as the study may be influenced by individuals who have an interest in the topic of increasing BIPOC families'

participation in ECFE programs. Some ECFE respondents may have refrained from participating in the survey due to a lack of gravity with the subject matter or the belief that the study lacks relevance.

Although there were a minimum of 75 participants, there was not an even distribution of rural, suburban, and urban participants in the survey, which impacted the survey results to be less representative of ECFE statewide. Additionally, 16 people did not consent to further participation after opening the survey. It is unknown whether the 16 participants accidentally submitted "no" to consent and then repeated the survey later or pressed "no" because they did not want to participate after reading the consent form. This unknown 16 participants may have had an impact on the survey results as well.

Another limitation could be the distribution of the survey. There were a few hiccups within the first couple of weeks of sending the survey. Sometimes, the emails bounced back with a note that the participant was out of the office for a week or two. Some participants may have intended to complete the survey but got lost in the mail during their time off. Many email distributions were also directed toward the district Early Childhood Directors or leaders or ECFE coordinators and relied heavily on their participation to send it to the appropriate staff who does outreach in ECFE. As a result, the survey results occasionally determined that some participants lacked knowledge about outreach, which did not create an accurate picture of that district's outreach information.

Future Research

The goal of this research was to provide more recent research on the ECFE practice and staff work that has been dormant for some time. The hope is to continue the research on ECFE to show its positive effects on the communities and provide a reason

for the staff and educators to continue doing great work that gives space for support and understanding of parenting. While I did this work with my own time and budget as part of a dissertation, I hope there is future funding for new ECFE research with better resources. Many participants suggested they also want to have targeted research on other minority groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community and English language learners.

To continue my research, it is worth revisiting this study from the current BIPOC caregivers' perspective and understanding if or what they know about ECFE, the reasons they chose to attend or not attend, if being offered affinity group classes meets their needs, and what their barriers are to attending. This information and research could help minimize the gap in BIPOC attendance in traditional group ECFE classes.

Communicating the Results

I plan to share the results in a few different ways. The findings about building trust and relationships as a form of outreach can be applied to many organizations trying to involve and recruit all communities in their surrounding areas. I will share this information in my organization as we constantly seek ways to invite more families into our school. This research will also be published on Hamline's online publication site called Digital Commons.

Since this research heavily involved the ECFE organization, I will also be sharing the results with leaders of ECFE or presenting at ECFE conferences, as suggested by my dissertation committee and a few board members of MNAFEE. Hopefully, this information validates their work and ignites continuing efforts to involve BIPOC communities in traditional group parent education settings in Minnesota.

Conclusion

As explained at the beginning of this research, I wanted to highlight the greatness of ECFE being the space for community gathering and creating comradery for parents to share joys and concerns. While ECFE is also known for providing a variety of support, such as home visits, which are supportive and personalized for each family, it was vital for me to examine their traditional group classes, which is the "basic service offered" according to MDE's quick guide of ECFE service, and "it is recommended that a major portion of the program budget is spent on [basic] service" (MDE, 2019, p. 1). Understanding the outreach methods concerning BIPOC attendance was also necessary for my research.

This research highlights some of the actions we should take in the future. Some recovery work has to take place after experiencing COVID-19. A few highlighted how their attendance of BIPOC families and communication with other organizations dissipated through this pandemic. They are trying to find ways to reconnect or make new relationships in the future.

While some of the exterior support, such as from MDE and budgeting, may take time, I hope for those who participated in this research, it brought an opportunity to reflect on their current practice, including the positive aspects and challenges, and affirmed or reinvigorated what they can do at this moment that is easily accessible, such as to reflect on their actions or inaction in outreach, cultural competency, to take a course, or if the budget allows, to hire staff or do professional development. My work was additional research to highlight the great potential of ECFE, which I hope is a catalyst to be a national model for the rest of the country.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

1) What is your race: White or BIPOC?

2) Where do you work (enter your zip code)?

3) How long have you worked in the current district? (make scale, 0-3, 3-5, 5-8, 8 years or more)

4) Do you feel like you know your working district well? (yes/no)

5) How long have you worked in the general ECFE program? (make scale,0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, or more)

6) Have you been an ECFE parent educator or coordinator? (yes/no)

7) What is your current role in the ECFE program? (List roles and make checkboxes and "other")

8) How many years of experience do you have in an ECFE position or related role? (scale 1-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, or more)

9) How many traditional group parent education classes are offered/taught per week? (scale: 1-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, other)

10) What types of traditional group classes are offered in your district (multiple checkboxes: reading groups, toddler groups, affinity groups, dad's only)?

11) How many parents attend your traditional group classes? (0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, or more).

12) On average, what percentage of BIPOC parents are represented in each traditional group class that are not in specific affinity groups? (scale: 0-10%, 11-25%, 26-50%, 50-100%, other)

13) I am/my program is making efforts to engage BIPOC families (agree-disagree likert scale)

14) What do you think are barriers that prevent BIPOC families from attending the traditional group classes? (multiple checkboxes: cultural/educational difference, lack of information, transportation, not enough BIPOC teacher representation, not enough available times, have a checklist including - I don't think there are any barriers for BIPOC families)

15) Would you do something specific at your site to counter the barriers? (Checkbox: Yes, put action in place; Yes, but budgeting is an issue; No, I'm proud of our work and it works well; other)

16) Would you be willing to share any success stories of engagement with BIPOC families? (short answer question)

I believe questions (rate from agree to disagree):

17) I believe our ECFE program provides the times conducive for all community members (agree-disagree scale)

18) I believe the number of BIPOC families attending group classes is representative of the district community (agree-disagree scale).

19) I believe our ECFE provides enough information about ECFE to the community it represents (agree-disagree scale).

20) I believe we provide transportation and support for those who need transportation

(agree-disagree scale and unsure).

21) I believe our program supports and adheres to understanding different cultural

expectations, such as gender and age, and other parenting values and styles

(agree-disagree).

Back to normal:

22) How many BIPOC parent educators are available in your program? (scale: 0, 1, 2,

3, 4, 5, or more)

23) What outreach methods have you used? (have multiple checkboxes and other)

24) Do you feel these methods are effective enough to reach all the communities in

your district? (yes/no)

25) I believe there are other outreach methods that our district can do to reach more

community members.

(Agree-disagree scale).

26) Our ECFE collaborates with other community programs (yes/no).

27) The collaborative methods are: (check all that apply: Parent educator goes into

another program to do group classes, parent educator and other program

co-teaches a class together, parent educator consults with the leader from another

program, other)

28) How often does the collaboration occur (once a semester, once a year, once a

quarter, some years we do, some years we don't, other)

29) How long are these classes? (one day (for 1-2 hours), 3-8 times a semester, 3-8

times a quarter)

30) Additional comments about the related questions.

31) Would you be interested in having a follow-up interview?

    If yes, please write your name and the best ways to contact you (email, phone

    number, text, etc).

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this interview. In the survey, we started to discuss the representation of BIPOC families in the traditional parent education classes in the ECFE programs. This is a follow-up interview, and you may notice I'm asking similar questions as the survey, but it is there so you can expand on some of the answers you put in there. ECFE is known to be one of the most innovative public programs, so I wondered how they are doing in reaching the demographic cross-section of families living within their district and especially BIPOC families and communities. While it is important to have affinity groups and other ways to involve BIPOC communities, it is also just as important to have traditional classes be as racially diverse. This survey and interview are to find out what and how ECFE staff are doing for outreach and to increase BIPOC participation.

1) Please share your name and what district you work and how long you have worked at your district as an ECFE teacher or related role.

2) *In the survey, you responded _____ to that your ECFE provides enough information about ECFE to the community it represents. Can you elaborate more on that and do you still feel the same?*

3) *Although you have mentioned this in the survey, please reiterate what are some of the ways that you have addressed the barriers and increased participation amongst BIPOC families in traditional group classes?*

4) What were the most successful efforts? (Maybe skip depending on the answer)

5) Do these efforts continue today? Why or why not?

6) Do you feel the barrier of cultural values and differences affects BIPOC parents from participating in these traditional group classes? If so, what are some of the ways that you have countered this barrier?

7) *You listed a few outreach methods such as _____ in the survey. Have they successfully brought in BIPOC families?*

8) Are there any other outreach ideas you have thought about, that may be new to you, or not listed as an example, and would like to try?

9) How do you think this will help with increasing more BIPOC participants in traditional group classes? (Maybe skip if answered from previous question)

10) *Please restate if there have been any collaborative parent education classes done with other organizations and community groups?*

11) Does the collaboration fulfill the goals of inclusivity of traditional group parent education classes? Is the traditional model the best model for every group?

12) Have they continued?

13) What has been successful with the collaboration and what are the challenges?

14) Is there anything else you want to share that will support future efforts and continue to address the barriers and increase participation for BIPOC families in traditional group classes?

APPENDIX C

Letter to Potential Survey Participants

Dear ECFE educator, coordinator, or outreach coordinator,

My name is Ayuko Uezu Boomer, and I'm a doctoral candidate at Hamline University, doing research on ECFE. As a parent and parent educator, I've always been fascinated by the ECFE program. I love that it's a public program available to the whole Minnesota community, which is not common in other states. I learned that few people know about ECFE, especially my BIPOC friends and adults who are not parents. From experience as a parent in ECFE and student teaching in ECFE sites, I also felt there weren't as many BIPOC families attending ECFE, especially in traditional group classes. Although some districts started to include affinity classes, not all would fit into that group, thus it is important to recognize the efforts of outreach being made in the most common classes, which are the traditional group classes.

To better understand the outreach and collaboration process of the different districts in Minnesota, you are being asked to participate in this survey and answer some questions. This research is being also done to recognize the efforts educators and coordinators make to include BIPOC families in ECFE traditional group classes and acknowledge the existing barriers.

This research will be an opportune time to learn about the possible barriers that may affect BIPOC families to attend, the outreach, and what is already being addressed by the ECFE programs to alleviate them.

You are being asked to tell us about what you do and your efforts. For the results to truly represent the state of Minnesota, it would be much appreciated if you complete this survey to represent your district. The survey should not take more than 20 minutes to complete.

All the responses are confidential, and the result and analysis will be presented through the region (urban, suburban, and rural) and pseudonyms.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Please email me at aboomer01@hamline.edu. Thank you for your support and time.

Sincerely,

Ayuko Boomer

APPENDIX C

Reminder Letter to Potential Survey Participants

Dear ECFE educator, coordinator, or outreach coordinator,

Last week, I sent you a survey to ask about your efforts in the outreach and collaboration process and the efforts educators and coordinators make to include BIPOC families in ECFE traditional group classes. Your participation is valuable and needed.

Please accept my sincere gratitude if you have already completed and returned the survey. If not, please fill out the survey as soon as possible. It is important that your experience and answers are included in this study in order to accurately represent the results in the state of Minnesota. The survey should not take you more than 20 minutes to complete.

Here is the link to the survey.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Ayuko Boomer

APPENDIX C

Reminder Letter to Potential Survey Participants #2

Dear ECFE educator and coordinator,

About a couple of weeks ago, I sent you a survey to ask about your efforts in the outreach and collaboration process and the efforts educators and coordinators make to include BIPOC families in <u>ECFE traditional group classes</u>.

It is very important that your experience and answers are included in this study to accurately represent the results in the state of Minnesota. If you have already completed and returned the survey, thank you. If not, please fill out the survey today. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. The survey should not take you more than 20 minutes to complete.

Here is the link to the survey.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Ayuko Boomer